Patient Partner popular with the over 80s at Nuffield Road Medical Centre

Nuffield Road Medical Centre (www.nrmc.nhs.uk) serves the north west area of the city of Cambridge, including several of the surrounding villages. Built in 1995, the centre has over 13,000 residents on its register, with a high proportion of elderly patients. Nuffield Road currently has 12 doctors and around 30 staff in a range of clinical and administrative roles.

The surgery first installed Patient Partner in 2008 as a way of reducing call congestion and improving patient access. The practice operates an advanced access system which enables patients to book with their preferred GP if they are available on the same day as well as booking more routine appointments up to four weeks in advance.

As same day appointments are released at 8pm the previous day, patients are able to use Patient Partner to book these when the surgery is closed, helping to ease call congestion when reception opens the next morning. In fact, Nuffield Road’s most recent Quality Report by the Care Quality Commission commented on how accessible patients found the surgery’s services, concluding that the combination of the automated telephone service and online booking system “had reduced the 8am rush to get an appointment”.

Both staff and patients find it useful having an automated telephone appointment booking system. Practice Manager Greta Evans explains “There’s no doubt that having the Patient Partner system has made it easier for our patients to take control of when and how they make appointments as it allows them time to choose the slot which best fits their schedule. A significant number of our patients opt to use the service and this has undoubtedly played an important part in reducing the volume of calls which need to be handled by receptionists.”

An analysis of the demographic using Patient Partner at Nuffield Road shows that the system is well used across a whole range of age groups, including those aged 80 years and over. The system is most heavily used by the 26-45 year olds.

“We have a long and well-established relationship with Voice Connect who support the system very well”
The system is popular with patients, including the older demographic. (40% of usage over a four month period). As this is the age group most likely to be in employment, it would suggest that they find the flexibility that Patient Partner offers particularly useful. This is followed by the over 60s who account for around one fifth of usage, whilst an average of around 70 callers each month are aged over 80, confounding the idea that older patients are less likely to use an automated system.

Greta reports that the system is popular with patients, including the older demographic who find the system simple to use. Whilst the practice also makes good use of online booking, people don’t need to remember a password to access the telephone service which makes it the preferred option for some. “Our patients are really happy with the system,” she comments. “If required, staff will help take the patients through the system for the first time, but we have found it simple to use and all age groups are able to navigate it very easily.”

Staff at Nuffield Road are also fulsome in their praise of the system. “The staff think Patient Partner is wonderful - it really helps to make their front line job less stressful. It’s also a great tool when dealing with complaints; because we release on the day appointments at 8pm, staff are able to explain how the system works which diffuses any potential complaints.”

**Patient Partner’s top three features:**

1. Patients are able to access appointments out of hours.
2. It doesn’t add to workload and frees up time for receptionists.
3. The system is reliable and easy to manage.

Since its installation at Nuffield Road, the functionality of Patient Partner has significantly increased in line with advances in technology. The practice now uses the system for repeat prescriptions, although Greta admits that they have yet to implement some of the updates and facilities due to time constraints. She hopes to extend the system’s use in the future.

“Our patients are really happy with the system”

She concludes “The system has really helped to ease the appointment system and we are delighted that in our recent Quality Report most patients reported that our services are easily accessible. We have a long and well-established relationship with Voice Connect who support the system very well. If any technical problems do arise, they are always quickly and efficiently sorted out. Having used the system for many years, I would happily recommend it to any practice looking to manage call handling and appointments more effectively.