Patient Partner ‘has improved patient satisfaction’ says Queen’s Road Medical Practice

The Queen’s Road Medical Practice (www.eqrmp.com) in Guernsey serves residents across the island and is one of just three GP practices offering primary care. The practice comprises two sites: one in the capital St Peter Port, and the other in the more rural location of St Pierre du Bois. With over 22,000 patients on their list, the Queen’s Road staff includes 14 GP Partners and 5 Associates in addition to nurses, admin staff, physiotherapists, an osteopath, a chiropractor and an acupuncturist.

As Guernsey is not part of the UK, but a possession of the British Crown, like all the surgeries on the island Queen’s Road Medical Practice is operated as a private practice. This means that patients pay for services such as GP appointments as well as visits to A&E and ambulance use. However, the Social Security Department contributes a £12 grant towards the cost of each GP appointment for qualifying patients and covers the full cost of primary healthcare for those in receipt of specific social security benefits.

The practice takes bookings between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday and from 8am to 12pm on Saturdays. Management at the surgery decided to install an automated system as a way of reducing call congestion at key times and improving patient access. On the suggestion of one of the partners who already knew about the system, the Queen’s Road Medical Practice went live with Patient Partner in 2012. It is the only surgery on the island to use an automated service.

As with most practices, Patient Partner initially operated on the surgery’s main phone number before being given its own dedicated number. Assistant Practice Manager Gill Quigley explains: “The technical installation between Patient Partner and our local IT service provider all went very smoothly. However, we found that the system worked better for our patients by offering a separate number, enabling them to use this option if they wish.”
Many patients now book appointments first thing in the morning or at the weekend when the surgery is closed.

The practice uses Patient Partner for GP appointments (except locums) as well as nurse appointments for flu clinics. Although the surgery opens for calls at 8am, it also offers some early morning appointments from 7.30am. Gill feels that using an automated system has helped significantly with out-of-hours communication, as well as easing call congestion.

“Our patients now have the ability to book appointments when the surgery is closed and often choose to do so first thing in the morning or at the weekends – a time when our phone lines are often at their busiest. Having the automated service offers increased flexibility, meaning that patients no longer need to wait for our phone lines to open at 8am. In addition, if a patient decides that they need an appointment during the evening or night before, they can access our early/next day appointments and are able to plan their day accordingly.”

The automated service is very popular with some patients, although unsurprisingly others continue to choose to speak with a receptionist during surgery hours to make their appointment. “Patient Partner has lived up to our expectations and has improved patient satisfaction amongst those who use the service,” Gill adds. “It also offers another valuable avenue for communication.”

Gill has also felt well supported by Voice Connect throughout the whole process. “The company has always been very supportive. They are helpful and quick to respond to any queries.”

“Having the automated service offers increased flexibility”

Finally she adds: “Patient Partner has proven as effective as we could have hoped. There is always the option for more patients to take up the service, but with 19 doctors, it enables us to offer more scope and easier access for booking appointments. As for other surgeries, I think it would also work particularly well for a practice with slightly less doctors and/or appointment variations. Ultimately, the system enables us to offer more choice for our patients – which can only be a good thing.”

Patient Partner’s top three features according to Queen’s Road Medical Practice:
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.