

A new digital communications system is making it easier for patients to attend their hospital appointments

Lincolnshire hospital patients are benefitting from a new system where they can manage their outpatients appointments digitally from anywhere at any time. This means they have more choice at their fingertips when booking, rearranging and confirming any hospital appointments.

Since the introduction of the new system United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust has seen a reduction in the number of people who do not attend (DNA) their appointment.

The Healthcare Communications digital portal replaces a postal system that relied on communicating with patients through letters. Since the portal's launch in outpatients, the DNA rate has dropped from 5.8 per cent in September 2018 to 4.1 per cent in January 2019, compared to the national rate of 8.9%. This reduction meant that around 1,000 extra patients were seen in January.

The new system sees all patients who have registered a mobile phone number with the Trust receive a text message with a secure link and four-digit PIN. By clicking on the link, entering their PIN and date of birth, patients can receive appointment letters straight to their smartphone and can accept, cancel or rebook their appointment in real time, freeing up cancelled slots for other patients.

Once confirmed, the appointment can be added directly into the patient's digital calendar, also helping to reduce the risk of them forgetting their appointment. Patients can also save the letter to their phone or email it, and print it off.

As well as their appointment date and time, the letter also includes pre-assessment instructions, essential reading and hospital information. Patients who would prefer a postal appointment letter are able to 'opt out' of the electronic system and continue to receive paper copies.

The portal has already seen postal letters reduced by 23,000 year-on-year, saving valuable NHS money and with the extra appointments it makes financial sense for the Trust.

Kelly Wymer, ICT Project Manager from United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust said "In the space of only a few months, we have seen incredible results from the portal. Patient feedback has been excellent with many keen to use it and support a more digital NHS."

Yaves Lalloo, General Manager Clinical Support Services, Outpatients, said: "This really is great news for our patients. I would really like to thank all of our staff for their hard work in helping us to see so many more people.

"The new system is better for our patients and by being able to cancel and rearrange their appointments it means we can then make the most of every possible appointment slot that is available, see even more patients and help to reduce waiting times."