

## Full Patient Briefing Note

### Introducing our Virtual Care Navigator – improving access without changing how you contact us

We know many patients have experienced longer waiting times on the phones and difficulty getting through at busy periods. Demand for GP services has increased significantly, and like many practices we must adapt — but we have **not** moved to a full “total triage” system where every request must be submitted online before you can speak to us.

Instead, we are introducing a new **Virtual Care Navigator** in partnership with Think Healthcare. This system works **alongside** our existing **X-on phone system** and our **online consultation tools** to help us manage requests faster, route them correctly first time, and keep telephone access available for those who need it.

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### What is the Virtual Care Navigator?

The Virtual Care Navigator is a digital assistant that helps guide your request to the right place in the practice without you needing to know which team to contact.

In simple terms, it:

- reduces unnecessary phone queues
- directs your request to the correct staff member or service
- allows routine matters to be handled quickly
- frees clinicians to spend more time with patients who need appointments

### Important Patient Note:

Reception staff are still here to help you. You can still contact us online. You can still call us. This system supports access — it does not replace it.

The difference is that your request will now be **organised automatically** and handled by the most appropriate team.

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### Why we are introducing it

We are seeing:

- rising patient demand
- increasing administrative workload
- phone lines becoming congested, especially mornings

This system allows us to:

- improve access to appointments

- reduce time spent waiting on the phone
- coordinate routine tasks more efficiently
- keep personal support for patients who cannot use online services

Our goal is **better access, not more barriers.**

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### **What you will be able to do**

From late February you will be able to use the system for routine tasks instead of waiting on the telephone.

#### **From 27 February**

You can contact us quickly for:

- Checking or cancelling appointments
  - General administrative queries
  - You will also receive guidance about booking blood tests and how to use local booking pathways.
  - Ordering repeat prescriptions (this will need patients to have a pin number to use the service – we will provide you with information as to how to request this)
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### **Administrative requests it will handle**

You will no longer need to wait on hold for many common requests. The system will help with:

- Sick notes (Med3 requests)
  - Test results queries
  - Referral follow-ups
  - Blood pressure submissions and booking information
  - Routine appointment requests
  - Private medical requests
  - Access to medical records
  - Subject Access Requests (SARs)
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### **From early-March**

The system will expand to include:

- Nurse invited Long-term condition reviews (e.g. asthma, diabetes monitoring)
  - Other Nurse invited prevention and chronic disease appointments
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## **By end of March**

The majority of appointment requests will be navigated through the system so they reach the correct clinician or team first time.

***(Implementation of this will be subject to final appointment review)***

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## **How this helps you**

This is not replacing reception — it is supporting them.

Benefits you should notice:

- shorter phone queues
- faster responses to routine queries
- fewer unnecessary appointments
- better coordination of care
- clinicians available for patients who need medical care

It also reduces the need for patients to contact us repeatedly for routine information (for example when test results are normal).

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## **Important reassurance**

- You can still telephone the practice.
- Reception staff are still here to help you.
- Patients who cannot use digital systems will always be supported.
- Urgent medical problems should still be reported to us by phone.

We are introducing the system gradually to make sure staff are fully trained and patients have clear guidance before each stage.

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## **Why the change is happening now**

A phased introduction allows us to:

- train staff safely
  - ensure systems work properly
  - provide clear patient information
  - avoid disruption to your care
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## **What you need to do**

Nothing immediately.

Closer to each phase we will:

- publish instructions
  - add website guidance
  - share social media posts
  - provide reception support
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## **Our aim**

To improve access **without removing choice**.

The Virtual Care Navigator helps us respond to rising demand while keeping telephone access and personal support — ensuring patients receive the right help, at the right time, from the right member of the team.

Thank you for your patience and support while we make these improvements.