



CONTRACT CHANGES FROM 1 OCTOBER GUIDANCE

Sheffield LMC have had a number of meetings with the ICB Place team regarding the new contract requirements from 1st October. We are aware that NHS England are monitoring practices directly on a number of contractual requirements. In light of this, we have provided guidance to facilitate practices being viewed as "compliant".

Practices are advised that it is now a contractual requirement for patients to access the practice, either directly or via an approved subcontracting arrangement, throughout the entirety of core hours via phone, attendance at the practice premises or via the online consultation tool. There is conflicting guidance and narrative around the definition of an online consultation and what constitutes access to routine care. FAQs from NHS England specifically regarding online consultations can be found [here](#).

The wording in the contract says:

16.5ZD Patient online services: provision of an online consultation tool

16.5ZD.1 A Contractor must offer and promote an online consultation tool to its registered patients.

16.5ZD.2 An "online consultation tool" is an online facility provided using appropriate software:

(a) through which:

(i) a patient; or

(ii) where the patient is a person to whom clause 16.5ZD.4 applies, an appropriate person acting on behalf of the patient;

may, in writing in electronic form, seek advice or information related to the patient's health or make a clinical or administrative request; but

(b) which does not require the response to be given by the Contractor in real time.

Opening Hours

Practices must ensure that both their practice websites and NHS.uk profiles accurately reflect their core opening hours (8:00am to 6:30pm, Monday to Friday). This includes:

- Clearly stating when the practice is open for in-person attendance, telephone access, and online consultation.
- If a subcontracting arrangement is in place for any part of core hours, this must be transparently stated. For example: "The practice is open between 8am and 6:30pm Monday to Friday. For some of these hours (insert hours), the phone lines are diverted to

an ICB approved subcontracting service who provide an equivalent service to that offered by the practice.”

- NHS.uk profiles must also be updated to reflect these arrangements to ensure consistency and transparency for patients.

Online Consultation Tool Availability

- Online consultation tools must be available throughout core hours for non-urgent appointment requests, medication queries, and administrative requests. Please note that as per NHS England guidance, there is no contractual requirement for practices operate a ‘Total Triage’ model during any part of the core hours. Practices can choose not to use the total triage model and keep the online consultation tools only for non-urgent appointment requests, medication queries and admin requests. Subject to capacity, practices may choose to direct patients with urgent medical requests to seek urgent medical attention via other avenues where clinically appropriate (e.g. Pharmacy First, NHS 111, Walk in Centre or the Emergency Department)
- These tools cannot be subcontracted (at present) and must not have a cap on the number of requests per day.
- Practices must respond to online requests on the same day if submitted within core hours.
- Practices may disable the tool outside of core hours if they wish.
- We understand that NHSEs current interpretation of the contract is that all channels for the online tool need to remain open throughout contracted hours and this is what they are monitoring. This is directly opposed to the interpretation from both the BMA and online providers.
- The BMA have noted and advised that the regulations do not dictate how online consult tools are configured, and they do not prevent modification to prevent erroneous submission by patients of urgent requests. NHS England’s [You and Your General Practice document](#) clearly states that urgent queries must be telephoned through to the surgery. When we are lacking adequate capacity to meet clinical demand, our priority is to keep patients as safe as we can using the systems we have access to.
- Until any update is received we would ask you to note NHSEs interpretation.

“You and Your General Practice”

- Practices must display a link to the NHS England “You and Your General Practice” document on their website homepage. This outlines what patients can expect from their GP practice and how they can support the practice team. Information can be found [here](#).

EDEC Submission Deadline

- The EDEC submission deadline is 21st November 2025.
- Practices anticipating changes to their access arrangements before this date may wish to delay submission until the deadline to ensure accuracy.

Support and Further Information

- Practices may be contacted by their ICB to confirm compliance with these requirements.
- If you are experiencing challenges in meeting these requirements, please contact Abby Tebbs (abigail.tebbs@nhs.net) or Sara Hartley (sara.hartley2@nhs.net) at your ICB for support to create an action plan.
- The LMC is also available to provide guidance and assistance, please don’t hesitate to get in touch (administrator@sheffieldlmc.org.uk).

We appreciate the significant pressures practices are under, particularly as we approach winter, and we are here to support you through these changes.