

# Online Consultations: Contractual Obligations

Sheffield  
LMC



## GUIDANCE FOR SHEFFIELD GPs

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In April and May 2021 there were a number of local and national enquiries about online GP services and what contractual obligations are required. Whilst GP online services are part of the NHS Long Term Plan, the regulations surrounding any implementation have not yet been enacted. The expectations of the digital offer are outlined in [Primary care SDF and GPIT funding guidance](#). They are fully set out in Annex C of the [NHS England and NHS Improvement \(NHSE/I\) letter](#) issued in January 2021:

*We confirm the definition of the core digital offer which all practices must provide to patients, including the offer and use of video and online consultations, ability to do online prescriptions, and online appointment booking. This is already the norm in the vast majority of practices. This is as follows:*

- *Practices offering online consultations that can be used by patients, carers and by practice staff on a patient's behalf, to gather submitted structured information and to support triage, enabling the practice to allocate patients to the right service for their needs*
- *The ability to hold a video consultation between patients, carers and clinicians*
- *Two-way secure written communication between patients, carers and practices*
- *An up to date accessible online presence, such as a website, that, amongst other key information, links to online consultation system and other online services prominently*
- *Signposting to a validated symptom checker and self-care health information (e.g. nhs.uk) via the practice's online presence and other communications*
- *Shared record access, including patients being able to add to their record*
- *Request and management of prescriptions online*
- *Online appointment booking*

*For online consultations and video consultations, practices will need to not only install online and video consultation tools but also use them ordinarily. Practices will be enabled with the tools and functionality, as part of CCG infrastructure responsibilities.*

NHSE/I note: *"While the ambition is for patients to be able to make requests via an online system at a time that suits them, as this is likely to be more convenient for patients and may increase patient satisfaction, there may be circumstances where this is not possible and practices need to limit access."* However, they also recognise: *"If a practice takes the decision to switch off its online consultation tool outside core hours, this can be done by the practice or by contacting the relevant supplier, depending on the tool in use. Practices should also inform their commissioner so additional support can be provided and wider issues around capacity and demand can be considered."*

Therefore, it is important for practices to continue using and developing online consultation tools to suit the needs of their patients. However, core general practice hours are 08:00 to 18:30 Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays), and practices can turn off their online tools outside of these hours as long as they have informed the commissioner that they are doing so. Sheffield GP practices should inform Sheffield CCG via [sheffieldccg.primarycare@nhs.net](mailto:sheffieldccg.primarycare@nhs.net)