

## **Introducing eConsult – Overview and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

### **What is eConsult and how does it work?**

eConsult is an online system that prompts patients to provide information that describes their current medical concern. Patients will be asked questions about their symptoms and it will only take a few minutes to complete. The completed form is called a health questionnaire.

After adding some personal details, to verify their identity, the eConsult system first uses built-in clinical knowledge to determine if help is needed more quickly than the Practice can provide e.g. emergency services. In these cases, the system will stop processing the request and suggest how to seek urgent medical advice. Otherwise the system submits the health questionnaire to the Practice where it is reviewed by our clinicians within 24 hours. We aim to deliver a response within 24 hours.

For example:

- If our clinicians decide that an appointment is needed, they will telephone to arrange this
- If a Fit Note is requested, an email or text will be sent to inform when this is ready for collection
- In the case of a minor illness, such as new cough or cold, we could text to advise a visit the pharmacy in the first instance

### **Why are we using eConsult for Christmas Maltings and Clements?**

In response to feedback that Christmas Maltings and Clements Surgery have received from its patients, and from the Care Quality Commission (CQC), we have undertaken a comprehensive review of our appointment system. Patients were waiting too long on the phone to get through to make an appointment and all too often the appointments were fully allocated.

To improve the situation, one of the changes we are making is to deploy a system using eConsult.

eConsult may be completed at any time and from any device. It can be completed from the comfort of your own home, on a tea-break, or on the train to and from work. The review of the health questionnaire by a Clinician takes place during normal Surgery working hours.

If the condition can be managed without contacting the Surgery, eConsult can guide towards trusted medical advice as well as relevant local services, such as pharmacy support.

Requests made on eConsult may be clinical or administrative in nature. In many cases the condition may not generate the need for a face-to-face appointment. This frees-up more GP time and appointments for those that really need to see a GP.

The eConsult service can be trusted and is completely confidential. It was built for NHS GPs by NHS GPs, and is the leading online consultation provider across the UK.

We believe that eConsult will allow us to offer more convenient access to information and advice. It will also allow us to prioritise patients who need more urgent care, or need to be seen face-to-face, whilst still enabling us to provide advice to patients who have less urgent needs.

### **How do I access eConsult?**

eConsult will be available on the practice website (<http://www.christmasandclements.co.uk/>) from any device and at any time of day. On the opening page of the website there are a set of red boxes to select from. Having done this a set of questions that invites the patient to submit concerns or conditions will need to be completed. At the end of the questions, upon submitting the questionnaire, the form will be received by the Surgery via this online system.

Once the form is submitted on eConsult, the patient will receive a copy via email. This email will contain the unique reference number relating to the form and is for possible future use in the event of the Surgery having to be contacted at a later date.

The Practice will aim to respond to requests within 24 hours.

The Practice may respond in a variety of ways, based on information provided or the urgency of the condition:

- If appropriate, an appointment with a Clinician may be offered, either on the day or for a later date.
- The patient may receive a phone call from a Health Professional at the Surgery; this is because a face-to-face appointment may not be needed to resolve the issue. This will save a visit to the Surgery
- Patients may be referred directly for investigations or a hospital appointment to further investigate symptoms
- Patients may be directed to another Health Professional outside the Surgery, as they may be best placed to offer the advice or support needed. This could include local pharmacy support, a minor injuries unit or other services such as physiotherapy
- Patients may be directed towards the appropriate self-help advice

Note: At all times the Surgery will protect patient privacy and cannot discuss personal matters unless the Surgery is certain they are speaking to the correct patient, or someone authorised to speak on their behalf.

### **What if I can't or don't want to use the eConsult service?**

For people unable to use or access eConsult the Care Navigator team will complete the eConsult health questionnaire over the phone with the patient.

**Please note:** The fastest way to complete a request will be for the patient to do this themselves online. Once completed, whether online or on the phone, all requests will be reviewed by our clinicians in the same time frame (within 24 hours). Method of contact is not given priority over another i.e. phoning a request will not mean patients are seen any quicker than if completed the request online themselves.

### **How will you benefit from eConsult?**

- eConsult allows patients to seek advice from the Surgery or help manage their own condition or symptoms at all hours of the day, from any location.
- The service will make interacting with the Surgery more convenient. Patients may not have to come into the Practice to get help. This could avoid unnecessary leave from work or if feeling poorly at home, patients may avoid the discomfort of an unnecessary journey to the Surgery

- Patients will not have to queue on the telephone. They will simply complete the request online to tell the Surgery why help or advice is needed. The Surgery will respond if a face-to-face appointment is needed, and ring the patient to arrange this.
- If the problem can be treated without an appointment, it can save a trip to the Surgery. Instead a Clinician may call to discuss the next steps, arrange for tests before a face-to-face appointment, or send a prescription to the local pharmacy to be collected
- Patients with the most urgent issues will be identified quickly and dealt with earlier than the current system allows. This is because the Surgery will already have an idea of why help is needed. This will improve safety by ensuring those who need help quickly get it
- A GP may not be the most appropriate person to see. eConsult assists the Surgery to identify the problem, determining the most appropriate member of staff to conduct the consultation.
- Using the information provided, together with knowledge built into eConsult and with a Clinician reviewing the questionnaire; a decision can be made on how urgently a patient needs to be seen.

### **Exceptions**

Patients who fall into the following categories will need to continue to call the Surgery as they are currently doing:

- Long Term Conditions Clinics (LTC).
- Blood Tests approved by a GP

### **Can I submit an eConsult for someone else?**

Generally, patients using the eConsult service should submit requests based on their own symptoms or conditions.

As a parent or guardian of a child between the ages of 6 months to 18 years, you will be able to submit requests on eConsult about symptoms or conditions of their child.

In some cases, people need help submitting their requests on eConsult. Friends and Family can assist in completing the form provided consent has been obtained.

### **Can I still book an appointment with my GP for a future date?**

If a Clinician has advised the need for a follow up appointment for a particular condition, there is a section on eConsult that can be completed in order to update the Surgery and appropriate follow up can be arranged.

### **At what time will the Surgery review patient health questionnaires each day, and what happens if a patient submits a health questionnaire after that time?**

During Surgery opening hours, clinical staff will review submitted health questionnaires throughout the day. The Surgery will respond to each patient within 24 Hrs, prioritising patients by their clinical need.

Patients can complete and submit a health questionnaire at any time. As you complete your health questionnaire, the system is deciding which questions you need to answer next. If your answers to these questions indicate you need to be prioritised, the system will flag your case to be dealt with as a priority. During Surgery opening times, any health questionnaires submitted, and determined to be a priority, will be seen by a clinician that day.

**Will all health questionnaires submitted on behalf of a child receive a call back from a GP?**

Children will always be prioritised and the parent or guardian will always receive a call back.

**If a GP decides that a patient needs to be seen again in about a week, how does this work?**

Patients that require a follow-up appointment need to complete an eConsult health questionnaire to request this. They should state that the GP is aware of the reported problem and has asked for a follow up appointment. This will be checked against the patient record prior to arranging the appointment.

Patients are advised to submit their health questionnaire for a follow-up appointment as soon as possible after their previous appointment.

**Can a patient with a complex condition see the same doctor for each follow-up appointment?**

If the triage team believes a patient's clinical condition can wait until a preferred GP is available, they will try to place the appointment with that GP. We always aim to provide our patients with continuity of care.

**Will the Surgery provide an iPad or computer in the waiting room for patients to complete and submit health questionnaires?**

This is something that the Surgery would like to provide at both the Clements and Kedington sites, but only if we can find ways to ensure patient confidentiality and comply with data protection legislation.

We will be working with our Data Protection Officer to determine if we are able to address these concerns.

**Other practices are already using the eConsult system. How are their patients getting on with it?**

The eConsult system has been used successfully by many surgeries across the country, including surgeries here in Suffolk.

Also, there has been:

- An independent review conducted in South London
- A 15-month observational study by Bristol University of 36 Surgeries using the system
- An impact assessment of 'eConsult' across 3 primary care settings

Millions of health questionnaires have been submitted over the four years since the system first began operating and patient feedback has been positive:

*"Very impressed - a doctor had assessed my symptoms and identified the need for action the same day. Very efficient and saved a visit either to A&E or walk in centre."*

*"Perfect service. Means I didn't have to find time during my working day to make a call. I didn't take up an appointment slot. I was left a clear message and felt well looked after."*

*"My experience was first class; I needed a prescription for eye drops which I'd had several years ago & the condition had flared again. It was ideal to just request the prescription without having to take up a valuable face to face or telephone appointment. I'm very happy with eConsult & will definitely use it in the future & recommend it to family & friends"*

**If a patient has begun filling out a health questionnaire but suffers internet or computer problems before they are able to click 'Submit', what should they do?**

Please start the health questionnaire again.

**Is the eConsult system an additional cost to the Surgery?**

Using eConsult does not cost the surgery any money.

**Do patients need to register to use the eConsult system and do they need a password?**

No, patients do not need to register to use eConsult and they do not need a password. After the eConsult system is launched on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019, patients can use it by visiting Surgery's Website (<http://www.christmasandclements.co.uk/index.aspx>). On the front-page of our website, patients will see four red boxes on a blue background. Click on the red box you believe will answer your enquiry and then start the health questionnaire.

**Can patients try the eConsult system before it is launched on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August?**

Yes. We have set up a demonstration site here. If you are online just go to this web site: <https://demo.webgp.com/>

**Please remember this is a demonstration site only and we will not respond to the demonstration health questionnaires you submit.**

**Can computers at a library be used to complete the form?**

Yes. Patients can use a computer at a library to access eConsult if they already have a library card. Patients without a library card can enrol, bringing along a form of identification with their name and address. For example, they can use a driving license, utility bill or property agreement.

There will be a demonstration of how to use the eConsult system at The Library in Camps Road, Haverhill.

This is a great opportunity for patients to try the eConsult system with support from the Surgery staff.

The dates are:

- 5 September 2019 – Thursday morning from 10am.
- 12 September 2019 – Thursday morning from 10am.

ADDRESS:

Camps Road, Haverhill  
CB9 8HB

Please just turn up, there is no need to book.

**Should patients use eConsult for Travel Clinic enquiries?**

No. Please call the Surgery to make an appointment.

**What if I have hearing difficulties?**

Your current arrangements will not change.

**When we receive call backs from the Surgery, the call display on our phones show as 'Unknown'. Can this be changed?**

Unfortunately, this cannot be changed. **Important Notice - If you have call minder please leave alternative contact details.**

**I have to hand in my phone when I start work, so how can answer if you call me back?**

Please contact the Surgery as soon as you can. You need to give us consent to leave you a voice message or send you a text when you are unable to answer your phone.

When we need to get in touch with you, we will then be able to leave you a voice message or send you a text containing a unique code.

This will mean you can call the Surgery when you are able, quoting this code, along with some personal details and the Care Navigation Team will be able to deal with your case.

**If a patient has a long-term medical condition and receives a letter requesting they book an appointment with a nurse, should they use the eConsult system?**

No. Please call the Surgery to make an appointment.

**If I do not need to use eConsult for a specific Nurse Appointment, when can I call the Surgery?**

Our opening hours are Monday to Friday 08.00 – 18.30. You can call us during these times.

**Does the eConsult system affect GP+ services?**

No. This does not change your 111, A&E or GP+ Services.

**What if a patient has more than one condition to report?**

If the conditions are related, there is somewhere to record this on the health questionnaire. If not, patients will need to complete a separate questionnaire.

**What if a patient has no way of accessing the website or cannot use technology?**

We would encourage all our patients to try and complete the health questionnaire on our website, either by themselves or with help from a family member. This saves time for you and us.

If not, please phone the Surgery and one of our trained Care Navigators will be take you through the health questionnaire, and complete it with you over the phone. If everyone is busy helping other patients, someone will call you back. You will not be penalised because you were not able to complete the health questionnaire yourself.

Calling the Surgery to complete a health questionnaire over the phone will not mean patients are seen quicker than those who complete the health questionnaire on our website. All the health questionnaires will be seen by our clinical triage team and dealt with in the same way.

Important Notice – If a patient cannot use the internet, they should be prepared to provide information to our trained Care Navigators in order for them to complete the questionnaire on their behalf.