

## **What Is Consultant Connect?**

### **What does Consultant Connect do?**

Consultant Connect provides GPs with immediate access to telephone based advice from local hospital consultants. It is for use by GPs who would otherwise have referred a patient to hospital.

GPs that need advice about a patient-specific case dial a local number and are then put through to a group of specialty consultants (called a "hunt group"). The call loops through all the consultants in the hunt group until one of them answers. The GP then speaks with the consultant. Calls are connected directly to consultant mobile phones rather than going via hospital switchboards.

The system is paperless as all conversations are recorded and stored as fully encrypted digital files for medico-legal purposes. The system is for advice only so the consultant has no follow-up admin to do.

## **FAQs**

### **How will we use Consultant Connect?**

Each GP practice will be given their own unique local rate telephone number through which they can access all specialty advice that the hospital is willing to offer. When they dial the number, they will be given a choice of specialties – e.g. Press "1" for Gynaecology, "2" for Paediatrics etc. Once they have made their choice they will be asked to input the patient's 10 digit NHS number (for medico-legal tracking purposes only). The call will then be routed to the chosen hunt group of consultants.

The consultant will receive a call on the phone number they have provided (normally your mobile number but on occasion this may be a 'baton' phone or a 'hotline' number). Upon picking up the call you will be asked to "Press 1" to accept the call. You will then be connected with the GP.

At the end of a Consultant Connect call you may hang up. Whilst GPs are primarily responsible for reporting the outcome of calls (via responding to simple keypad options), as a back-up you will also receive a text SMS message asking you to rank the outcome of the call by simply replying: 1 for Referral Avoided; 2 for Referral Made; 3 for Diagnostics Requested; 4 for Admission Avoided; and 5 for Admission Made.

### **During what hours of the day does Consultant Connect operate?**

The hours of service availability are initially 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Each day is split into as many clinical sessions as you require (for example, 9am – 1pm, then 1pm – 5pm) and consultants should liaise with specialty managers to determine which sessions they are available for. We will provide access to a simple rota system for each specialty team. This will allow team members to be deselected from the rota if they are not going to be available at any time during the week. The rota also allows the team to choose the order that calls are routed through the hunt group for each clinical session. If a GP dials Consultant Connect outside of operating hours, the call will not be connected.

### **How will we recognise an incoming Consultant Connect call?**

You will be provided with contact details for Consultant Connect which you can store on your mobile phone such that the inbound number is recognised. It is also recommended that you also allocate a specific ring tone to the contact details. Note: the incoming number will always be: 07441 906809.

### **Will consultants be using personal mobile phones?**

In our experience consultants prefer to use their own mobile phones for work purposes in preference to having to carry two phones around with them. However, should you wish to discuss this matter then please contact your specialty manager.

All consultant mobile phone numbers remain confidential within the system and will not be used for any other purpose. GPs using Consultant Connect do not have access to individual consultant mobile phone numbers as they access the system only via their unique number that covers all specialties.

### **What happens to the recording of the Advice & Guidance conversation?**

Call recordings are stored securely, and into perpetuity, as fully encrypted digital files and are made available to GP Practices to attach to patient records and to hospitals for medico-legal purposes.

### **Do I have to answer every call?**

No. We understand that you are extremely busy. If you are unable to answer a call you can either ignore it (it will ring for about 20 seconds and then stop) or reject it; the call will then loop to the next consultant in the 'hunt group'. Consultants should not feel awkward about ignoring a call if they are not in a position to take it as there is a good chance that one of your colleagues will pick up the call.

### **What happens if no consultants answer a call?**

It is accepted that, on occasion, all consultants will be busy and a call from a GP will not be answered; in fact, nationally some 10%-20% of calls go unanswered. GP expectations have been managed in this regard and should their call go unanswered they are advised to try again later or revert to alternative pre-existing means of contacting a consultant.

### **Will we be overrun with calls?**

No. Based on experience in other areas of the country we expect that each consultant will answer an average of 1 – 3 calls per week, each call lasting an average of 4 minutes. Where teams have a duty doctor whose role is to field calls, that person is usually put at the top of the 'hunt group' list to ensure other consultants are only called if the duty doctor is not available.

### **Which specialties are going to be available?**

The selection of specialities is determined by the CCG, primary care and secondary care in consultation.

### **Will we get to see stats for usage?**

Consultant Connect offers reporting of all relevant statistical data to CCGs, GP Practices and Hospitals as requested by them. Hospital teams will be provided with login details should they wish to access relevant statistics that demonstrate the volume of advice provided and the associated outcomes.

### What are the benefits?

- **Better patient experience** – avoid hospital in many cases, reduction in follow-up visits to the GP Practice
- **Better consultant experience** – reduction in inappropriate referrals, reduced overall activity, less time spent providing written responses to advice requests, reconnecting with GPs
- **Better GP experience** – more patient episodes concluded with no follow-up work, case based learning, reconnecting with consultants
- **Better for the hospital and CCG** – full tracking and reporting of advice provided by each hospital specialty team, greater 'whole system' efficiency, with savings available to support other hospital and community initiatives

### Feedback

- GP feedback:
  - "excellent initiative - back to the old days when speaking person to person made much more sense"
  - "used it today and it was amazing! spoke to [Dr X] within a minute of calling"
  - "Works well. Efficient. Makes our life much easier and better for patients. Far more economic - saves unnecessary referrals!"
- Consultant feedback:
  - "Simple and effective. GPs I have spoken to were pleasantly surprised to get through."
  - "It is a no brainer. Most GPs and Consultants wish the same thing - efficient way to sort out a clinical issue. Nice to have a quick chat."

### What does it cost the hospital?

The Consultant Connect system is funded by the CCG and there is no cost to the hospital.

### Contact Details:

For any service or technical related issues, please contact Consultant Connect on:

**Tel:** 01865 261451 (note: this number does not provide access to any clinical teams)

**Email:** [support@consultantconnect.org.uk](mailto:support@consultantconnect.org.uk)