

## GP at Hand Q&A

### 1. At a glance:

NHS England (London) and Hammersmith and Fulham CCG want to ensure that all our patients have access to high quality primary care when they need it. Technological advances mean there are now more innovative ways patients can access health services and we are exploring how we can make the most of those.

GP at Hand is using technology to offer an innovative NHS service, with GP appointments available via smartphone 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### 2. How does it work?

GP at Hand is provided by a practice within NHS Hammersmith and Fulham CCG, who now offer digital and in-person consultations to registered patients, including patients who register from out of the area (under the GP choice regulations). Key features and conditions include:

- it is free at the point of use for patients
- the service is currently available for patients to register if they live or work within central London
- it is subject to all the usual information governance and information security rules – just like any NHS practice
- it may not be suitable for everyone and it's important that patients consider their needs before re-registering. GP at Hand will give advice to patients seeking registration who have complex needs, to ensure it is a clinically appropriate choice for them
- we will continue to evaluate the service to ensure it is safely delivering for all patients who use it, in line with the standards we expect for all practices offering NHS primary care.

### **3. Is this an NHS service?**

Yes, this is an NHS General Medical Practice.

### **4. Can the service be used by anyone?**

Registration with GP at Hand is available to people regardless of their age, and whether they are in good health or not. Patients will need to live within a certain proximity to GP at Hand's surgeries in order to register. They can also register if they work in London zones 1-3. Patients will need to de-register at their current NHS GP practice in order to join the GP at Hand practice.

It is important that patients have the widest possible choice of services and reflect the way people live their lives today. The service offered through GP at Hand will work very well for some patients.

There are some patients however, for whom it may not be clinically appropriate to register as an out of area patient. In line with the GP Choice regulations and guidance, patients will be advised by the practice if they believe it may not best meet their needs.

### **5. Which patients are advised not to apply with GP at Hand?**

At the request of NHS England and Hammersmith and Fulham CCG, GP at Hand display a list of conditions for which patients should seek advice before registering with the service, these are:

- women who are or may be pregnant (if you are pregnant, NHS England advises that you register with a GP practice close to where you live)
- adults with a safeguarding need
- people living with complex mental health conditions
- people with complex physical, psychological and social needs
- people living with dementia

- older people with conditions related to frailty
- people requiring end of life care
- parents of children who are on the 'Child at risk' protection register
- people with learning difficulties
- people with a drug dependence.

## **6. Why has this service been allowed to advise certain groups of patients against registering? Will this be repeated elsewhere?**

It may be that this sort of service is likely to be of particular benefit to those people with episodic, well defined needs, those who are digitally confident, and those who find it difficult to access services near where they live. However there are a range of other patients who may find such a service beneficial because they struggle to get to their GP practice. It is important that people make an informed choice about whether this is the right service for them. An increasing number of practices are offering the opportunity for patients to access care online or over the telephone where this is appropriate. The evaluation that will be carried out on the GP at Hand service will help deepen our understanding of who will benefit most from this sort of approach.

It's not the case that those with mental health issues, who are frail or are pregnant, cannot be registered but for some, this type of digital or remote care model may not be clinically appropriate. That is why people are asked to seek advice from the practice if they have complex care needs.

## **7. Will the service involve charges for patients?**

No. Like any other NHS GP practice, NHS services will not be charged for.

## **8. How will a patient who is unsatisfied with the quality of the service re-register with a GP surgery?**

Patients can re-register with the existing practice as per existing arrangements.

**9. Is this an example of a private company being subsidised by the NHS for private profit while taking money from GPs?**

The GP at Hand practice is a NHS GP partnership and is subject to the same commissioning arrangements that the CCG has with all other local GP practices.

**10. Does this service not “cherry pick” relatively simple, discrete consultations leaving GPs with more complex and chronic care conditions?**

The service will be responsible for providing comprehensive primary care to all of the patients that register with the GP at Hand practice. However, it is true that a service accessible via smartphone may be more attractive and better suited to certain groups of patients. Whilst we acknowledge that ‘one size does not fit all’ in terms of how primary care should be delivered in the future, we will be monitoring the situation to ensure that this new way of working does not disadvantage patients remaining with their existing practice.

**11. Could this service drain patient numbers from GP practice registers, making it harder for other services to be financially viable?**

Since January 5 2015, all GP practices in England have been free to register new patients who live outside their practice boundary area. Many patients have already opted to do this, for example to register near their place of work. We are monitoring and evaluating the GP at Hand service, given the potential scale of new registrations.

**12. Is there any published evidence that this type of service operates safely in the interests of patients?**

Hammersmith and Fulham CCG and NHS England have already undertaken a [clinical review](#) of GP at Hand, which has been

published. The clinical review concluded that the model was innovative and had the potential to benefit patients and the wider healthcare system. In light of this clinical review, revisions were made to the rollout of GP at Hand which were agreed by the CCG and NHS England.

### **13. What are the published CQC protocols showing how the safe running of such a service can be monitored?**

We are not aware of the CQC having any specific guidance relating to a comparable primary care model. However, the practice will be subject to the same inspections as any other practice.

### **14. Could this service effectively take over as a replacement for 'traditional' GP practices?**

NHS England will keep the impact under review and in time will use the learning to help inform future digital services. NHS England and Hammersmith and Fulham CCG will continue to act in the best interests of patients in considering the agreement to any further expansion of the GP at Hand service.