



Care Navigation Frequently Asked Questions

NHS County Durham CCG

What is Care Navigation?

Care Navigation offers individuals choice by providing information to help them move through health and social care services and access the support that is right for them. Care Navigation involves members of our GP practice teams being trained to support patients by signposting them to the most appropriate professional or service.

This is being implemented to help patients ensure they receive the right care, first time and as efficiently as possible. This includes signposting you to a person or service within the practice as well as other NHS organisations, social care and in the community.

Care Navigation does not prevent you from seeing your GP and will only be offered in cases where the reason for an individual contacting the practice relates to one of the identified seven 'pathways' listed below.

- Stopping smoking
- Sexual health
- Community pharmacy
- Citizens Advice Bureau (e.g. benefits and evidence claims)
- Well-being for Life support (e.g. Weight loss)
- Minor eye ailments (in place from Winter 2018)
- GP practice services already provided by other members of staff (e.g. Immunisations)
- Minor Eye Conditions Service (MECS)
- Veterans health
- Dental services
- Extended access – evening appointments in other hub practices
- Social Prescribing Link Worker (SPLW)
- Musculoskeletal (MSK) and First Contact Practitioner (FCP) – from Spring 2020

Why is County Durham CCG implementing Primary Care Navigation?

We know that every appointment and contact in the NHS matters. We want to make sure that every patient is able to see the right person to provide them with the right care at the right place and time.

GP practices are very busy and we need to be able to manage this so that appointments are available to you when you need them. Sometimes patients could be seen more appropriately by another member of staff in the practice or somewhere else.



By offering patients the information and choice about where they could receive appropriate support (such as an appointment with a Practice Nurse or at a Community Pharmacy) it can help free up GP appointment time to care for patients who need to be seen by a GP.

Do I have to accept the 'Primary Care Navigation'?

No. Patients will still have the choice of whether to accept what is being offered through Care Navigation in their own practice. A patient can still request to see their GP or another member of practice staff. A note that the offer of 'Care Navigation' was declined will be added to the patient's record as part of our on-going quality and monitoring of the service.

Will it mean patients being put on hold for ages, waiting to be put through to other services?

Following visits to other areas that have already implemented Primary Care Navigation we observed that the telephone system experienced no additional delays in being able to respond to patients' queries.

Currently all of the practices that use answer phone systems, have adopted recorded GP telephone message asking for a brief description of the problem you are calling about.

Patients will often think about the reason and give it straight to the Care Navigator when they get through saving valuable seconds. It helps to have easy access to clear information which can be provided to patients to help them choose the most appropriate service.

What about confidentiality if sitting at reception desk?

We recognise that General Practice operates from a variety of buildings with a variety of layouts. As a CCG we cannot guarantee all these buildings are conducive to support Care Navigation at implementation. However, we have asked every practice in County Durham to assure us that they have arrangements in place to protect the confidentiality of patients in reception as part of the future delivery of Care Navigation.

We have looked at examples of how this has been successfully done in other parts of the country and there are a number of approaches that are possible but what will work best may be different for each practice depending on the layout.



What skills / training will the 'Care Navigators' have?

A complete package of training has been made available by the CCG to support the staff that will be delivering 'Care Navigation in each practice. This includes a mixture of face to face and online sessions to enhance their knowledge of both the services included and the practical use of the Primary Care Navigation systems.

Additionally, training has been provided to staff in relation to their own personal development, communication, customer services and resilience skills to support them in the implementation of Care Navigation. Receptionists have also completed soft skills training to emphasise the role of the receptionist in being respectful / empathetic to the patients and their needs, providing wider impacts to the interactions people have with their local GP practice.

How will this apply to appointments booked online?

For the patients who book online we need to ensure they get the same information about local services as those who call for GP appointments.

Are all GP practices signed up to deliver Primary Care Navigation?

Currently all of the practices in County Durham offer Care Navigation. Many of those already do their own internal navigation to help provide the best care for patients. We are working with all of our practices to help them look at how Care Navigation can work best for their staff and patients.

How will information about the appropriateness of Care Navigation signposting be tracked and monitored?

We have worked with the staff in the services included and wider stakeholders as part of the co-design process through our workshops. This will ensure information is based on up to date details and requirements.

The information included has also been directly reviewed by GP clinical leads at the CCG as part of the development.

The CCG jointly with Healthwatch County Durham undertook an independent evaluation of this programme. Healthwatch County Durham collected the views and experiences of patients, practice staff and staff in services included in the initial implementation after the initial 6 months of operation.

The evaluation report can be find [here](#).

Our learning from other areas has also highlighted the effectiveness of peer reviews between practices. These have shown that they provided valuable opportunities for different practices to connect, share best practice and support each other in their approaches to Care Navigation.



What if the Care Navigator is unsure?

The purpose of the staff delivering Care Navigation is to help provide patients with a choice of appropriate services and not clinically triage them. If there is any doubt regarding the suitability of an alternative service or support for a patient then they would be directed to a member of staff within their General Practice in the first instance.

What if the receptionist makes the wrong decision?

Care navigators do not make clinical decisions.

Based on the information that patients contact the surgery with and are requesting support with, the staff delivering Care Navigation can offer a choice of what is available. The patient can always choose whether to take up the offer that is provided or choose to see their GP or Nurse if requested.

Do the calls to Primary Care Navigators cost me or the NHS anything?

No this is part of what is being provided through our local Primary Care (GP practice) services. The staff delivering Care Navigation are the same staff that are already part of the local GP practices teams. There is no charge beyond your normal cost for making a call to your GP practice on their usual number.

What about increased demand on support provided by various Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations?

We are encouraging increase in access of the VCS organisation through Care Navigation. It is likely that the same outcome would have been achieved through the appointment with a GP. Through Care Navigation it is intended to speed up the ability of anyone to get to the right place to receive support that they require. The experiences from other areas already using Care Navigation is that the VCS organisations are well established at being able to respond to this level of referral activity and respond appropriately.

Equally Social Prescribing Link Workers are now working in most of County Durham practices to offer community based groups or as well as more access to the voluntary organisations based in the area.

Further information

A short [video introduction to Care Navigation](#) is available online which has been produced locally.

The information contained in this document has been developed through conversations with Healthwatch County Durham, Patient groups working with the CCG, conversations with Area Action Partnership boards and queries from staff in Primary Care.



Clinical Commissioning Groups
in County Durham

If you have any further queries about Care Navigation in your area you can get in touch with us via cdccg.enquiries@nhs.net