

# Scottish Government

## GP DACS

### Update July 2021, issue 1

This newsletter aims to keep GP Practice teams, Board eHealth leads and GP Sub-committees up to date about Scottish Government support for the provision of Digital Asynchronous Consultation Systems (DACs) for General Practices across Scotland.

## Our digital world

Our world today is undeniably digital. Digital technologies are transforming the way in which people live their lives across Scotland. The current pandemic has seen a rapid growth in the use of digital technologies to support primary care service delivery.

In many ways Covid-19 has accelerated the pace of a change that was already underway. People increasingly look to digital tools to support their access to a multitude of services, and health and care is no different. People want and expect to have greater choice over how – and increasingly when – they access their care.

## What is GP DACS?

GP DACS describes a range of online General Practice digital tools that support clinical triage and remote consultations where the healthcare provider and the patient are not necessarily present at the same time. For example, digital triage is most commonly provided as an online store-and-forward transaction where the patient completes a form in their own time, which is then reviewed, assessed, and responded to by the relevant health professional. Systems such as eConsult, askmyGP and EMIS online Consult are all examples of GP DACS.

General Practices can decide whether to use DACS as an addition to other services they offer where appropriate to meet patients access needs and it is not intended to replace other methods of access such as telephone or face to face.

## GP DACS Background in Scotland

A very small number of Practices in Scotland were using online triage tools before the pandemic but following a small pilot project supported by Scottish Government there was little wider interest. However, during the pandemic and with the increasing demand on General Practice, interest in DACS has grown, with some Boards providing short-term DACS solutions to GP practices. Some General Practices have also made their own investments in these technologies.

In response to a request last year from the Scottish Joint GP IT Group (RCGP/ SGPC), the Scottish Government, as a component of improving how digital technology supports primary care staff to deliver services, has endorsed proposals to pursue a national approach to be taken to navigate a busy and fast changing marketplace for the provision of DACS for General Practices. This was informed by a desk-top market scoping exercise which confirmed that a DACS which could fulfil the range of potential use cases in General Practice was not currently available on the open market.

Work to date has involved consulting with early adopters of eConsult, EMIS Online Consult, Klinik and askmyGP products and surveying General Practices across Scotland about their impressions and requirements from online triage tools.

As part of the wider process, potential routes to procuring national tools are being explored and particular attention is being paid to how new digital tools could be best introduced into everyday practice alongside existing GPIT tools and clinical systems.

Findings from the survey and early adopter interviews we have carried out have shown us that the functionality of the GP DACS triage tools currently used in Scotland falls short of what General Practices and patients expect and need in the future. In particular, the ability to integrate with local systems, the configurability of web forms and the range of functionality are all areas for improvement.

For this reason, recognising the marketplace is fast changing with constant innovative solutions being developed, the national approach will formally engage the market in an exercise to better understand the range of available products and their capabilities in order to understand how to achieve the best value solution for the widest range of practice and patients' needs.

This decision means that instead of initiating a procurement exercise this summer, it will be towards the end of 2021 before a consulted and finalised set of requirements will be ready and procurement can begin. Local Health Boards and practices will wish to consider whether to continue with their local arrangements (where these exist) in the meantime or wait for the national arrangements to become available.

Whilst the Scottish Government understands that this delay may be disappointing for practices and boards keen to move forward with the utilisation of DACS, there is a balance to be made with doing something quickly against meeting the needs of practices and patients now and in the future. Therefore, it is important that we take the time to ensure we get the right products for Scottish practices and patients.

The Scottish Government seeks to support the adoption of GP DACS in all practices that wish to participate in the national approach.

## **Adopting DACS within GP Practices**

At present, helpful experience has been gained through local implementations of solutions including NHS Near Me, Scale-up Blood Pressure remote monitoring and online triage by practices and work has now commenced to develop an appropriate national approach including the production of good practice guidance to support practices keen to introduce DACS in the future.

We recognise that when adopting the use of DACS, practices will need to reflect the demographics and health care needs of the population that they serve. The success of digital product adoption depends as much on streamlining and aligning working practices and processes and training staff within practices, so work to support this outcome will be included as part of the overall national approach.

Online GP triage is a service for patients who are confident in using digital services and no one should be forced to use it. Practices must ensure that protocols are in place for patients who may need assistance to access healthcare services in other ways. A flexible approach and clear communication with patients will be key to success.

## GP DACS findings

In order to support this national approach, we did a survey of GP practices (users and non DACS users) earlier in the year. We also met with some practices that have knowledge of and/or implemented an online triage solution. Insights obtained from GP practices and their teams has informed this work.

## Governance

A GP DACS steering group, convened by the Primary Care Directorate, Scottish Government will guide and ratify the work of the GP DACS project team.

The steering group includes stakeholders representing a range of GP and Practice interests such as SGPC, RCGP, SCIMP and SNUG, as well as those of Health Board Digital Leads, HIS, NSS and NES.

Governance for the project team is provided through the Scottish Government Digital Health and Care Directorate as part of the Remote Health Pathway Programme Board.

## What stage is GP DACS work at now?

We are:

- Working with key stakeholders to continue to develop the requirements specification for the outline business case.
- Working with Health Improvement Scotland to identify strategies to scope what is required in practical terms to support adoption and implementation in GP practices.
- Gaining a better understanding of citizens' needs and preferences for using GP DACS to access primary healthcare services.
- Working with NHS National Services Scotland and Board eHealth representatives to further develop assessment of current market capabilities, costs and appropriate routes to market.

## That's it for now

If you have any feedback or want to know more about GP DACS, you can submit your views and suggestions to our mailbox at [nss.tec@nhs.scot](mailto:nss.tec@nhs.scot).

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