

Learning to change

How the use of **Near me** was successful in improving access to speech and language therapy for adults on the Isle of Arran

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About SLT Service

The North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership (NAHS CP) Speech and Language Therapy Community (SLT) Adult Team covers a wide geographical area across mainland North Ayrshire and the islands of Arran and Cumbrae, working in a range of locations including community clinics, care homes, community hospitals and visiting people in their own homes. Travel by road and ferry across such a large area is costly in time and can be disrupted by weather resulting at times in cancellation of appointments.



The Plan

In November 2018 the NAHS CP SLT Adult Team identified that the use of video consultations had the potential to improve patient care and reduce travel time.

In order to move forward with this we worked with the Digital Nurse Specialist to develop a business case to become early adopters of Near Me and pilot its use with patients who lived on Arran.

Partnership Working

With approval for our Near Me pilot our team identified that we would need to develop our skills in using the technology to support our patients to have positive experiences of video consultations. The Digital Nurse Specialist supported the team by:

- Demonstrating Near me
- Procuring and setting up equipment for video consultations
- Setting up SLT Team with Near Me log ons
- Supporting test calls
- Development of patient letter template and information leaflet

We identified that our patients on Arran might have connectivity problems particularly in remote locations, resulting in them being unable access Near Me from home, or that they might not have a computer or tablet. The Arran Operations Manager supported the team by:

- Identifying an outpatient room and laptop to allow patients to access their Near Me appointment at Arran War Memorial Hospital (AWMH)
- Supporting test calls
- Supporting patients on arrival for their Near Me appointment

Pilot outcomes

The Near Me pilot took place from July until October 2019. Patients referred for swallowing assessment were excluded from this pilot.

All patients were contacted to discuss attending their SLT appointment via Near me. This discussion covered:

- Offer of a video appointment with SLT (which they could decline)
- Did they have access to tablet/computer and reliable internet access at home
- Offer of a Near Me SLT appointment at AWHM if they had difficulty with technology or connectivity

No. of patients offered Near Me SLT appointment	SLT Consultation
2	Near Me at home
4	Near Me at AWHM outpatients
1	Near Me at Montrose House Care Home
2	Declined via Near Me – f2f arranged

This was a very small scale pilot of the use of Near Me by our service, but feedback from patients who attend their SLT appointment via Near Me was very positive.

- All patients commented that they liked having no or significantly reduced travel to attend appointments
- All patients commented that they did not have to worry about the impact of weather/ferry cancellation on appointments
- One patient commented that attending via Near Me was much less tiring

Our SLT Team developed confidence in the use of Near Me from this very small scale pilot, and quickly mainstreamed the use of Near Me as part of our outpatient service on the mainland. This enabled us to quickly further increase our use of video consultations in March 2020 due to the impact of COVID 19 on face to face appointments.

Our Learning

- Willingness of staff to embrace a new approach in SLT Service Delivery
- Importance of short skill building sessions to build staff confidence.
- Partnership working between SLT Team, Digital Services Nurse Specialist, Arran Operations Manager and North Health and Social Care staff were key to the success.

Swallowing Assessments via Near Me

April 2021

Our SLT Team continue to embrace change and develop our use of video consultations.

We are currently undertaking a pilot of the use of Near Me for swallowing assessments, to establish if we are able to do this in a clinically safe and sustainable way.

Training for nurse colleagues to become teleswallow partners, and the time for our SLT Team to develop and deliver this, has previously been a barrier to moving forward with a pilot swallowing assessments via Near Me.

We are working with our colleagues at Arran War Memorial Hospital and Montrose House on Arran, and with the support of Teleswallowing (logo trademark) and myAko (logo trademark) who are providing staff at the pilot sites with free access to online training modules:

- Level 1 – develops understanding of swallowing and how to support people with eating and drinking difficulties
- Level 4 – for trained nurses/ senior care practitioners to develop skills required to support SLT in swallowing assessments via Near Me



Progress to date

- Staff at AWHM and Montrose House have completed L1 or L4 Teleswallow (trademark) training Modules
- Remote coaching sessions for staff who have completed L4 modules have been led by SLT. These have covered:
 - Use of Near Me – technology, set up and connectivity tests
 - Preparation for sessions
 - Practical activity – mock swallow assessment

With training of staff and coaching sessions completed, we are now ready to move forward with our first swallowing assessments via Near Me.

Patients referred from AWHM and Montrose House will be triaged via normal SLT process – as part of that, suitability for assessment via Near Me will be agreed. Where the patient is considered not suitable for swallow assessment via Near Me, a face to face assessment will be arranged.

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