



HOW CALL QUEUEING BROUGHT ORDER TO THE PRACTICE

- A very happy PM (April 2019)

When I joined the surgery in 2018, our rating on NHS Choices was averaging 2.8/5 stars with most of the complaints regarding the telephone access. According to the GP Patient Survey, only 31% of respondents found it easy to get through to the surgery by phone - a worrying statistic as this was, and still is, our primary source of inbound contact. The reception team were passing complaints over to me and I knew I needed to review the situation as one of my first tasks at the practice.

I spent a few days in reception during the morning peak times. The reception team were diligent and handled the calls efficiently so I knew it wasn't a personnel issue. I had my phone added to the ring group as an overflow for reception and chimed in with answering the calls but the minute the phone went down it was ringing again. I knew this was never going to be a sustainable solution but even with me helping the pressure was still unbearable. Patients that had struggled to get past the busy tone, had then been stuck on hold, and then when they finally got through they proceeded to complain about the time it had taken (keeping the line occupied and preventing other patients from being able to get through).

We physically didn't have space for more receptionists and if we recruited, the new member would only be required first thing in the morning and would be positioned away from the rest of the team - not ideal. So I turned to our telecoms provider. The surgery had been in a telecoms contract with the same supplier for some years but had not long upgraded the system and handsets on a rental contract. They weren't very forthcoming with ideas so I didn't think there was much more I could do there.

A fellow practice manager mentioned a new call queueing software they had just added at their surgery. The system answers calls, queues them in 'the cloud' and then drops them through to the receptionists in order, and comes with a wallboard where you can see live statistics. They even had a way that patients could hold their place in the queue and receive a call when they're at the front of the queue. I thought such a programme sounded too good to be true and if by some miracle it was compatible with our existing system, it would probably be costly. My interest was peaked and I requested a consultation with their provider, Premier Patient Line.

The consultant gave us a demo of the system and talked through our particular requirements. He was able to provide pricing there and then, which to my surprise was very affordable. Not even 4 weeks later, our new system was live. They provided a recorded message to tell our patients that the surgery phones had changed and that we had a queueing system which allowed them to request a callback - a feature that is becoming increasingly popular with our patients. Our wallboard shows all the statistics we want to see and report on, and this is customisable so can be changed if we want this formatted differently or to see different call data.

We've had this in place for a few months and have already seen a reduction in complaints - we've even had compliments from patients about the improvement to their call experience. The receptionists are still as efficient but with less pressure on them. However, the best improvement we've seen is a reduction in DNAs which wasn't even an objective within this project! I could not be happier.