

NHS Lothian GUM Clinic Frees Nurses' Time, and Improves Patient Care using the Telephonetics VIP Result™ solution



Resources in the health sector are under enormous strain and with staff under pressure to provide the best patient care possible using the resources available, can the innovative use of telecoms help with patient care? The answer is a resounding yes!

The Challenge

Alan Hush is the Telecoms Manager for NHS Lothian in Scotland. In 2005 the Consultants in the Lauriston GUM (Genito-Urinary Medicine) clinic in Edinburgh approached Alan to discuss problems with the way they delivered medical test results to patients; the department had been totally overwhelmed by calls from people wanting to know the results of their recent tests, often before they were available. The clinic needed to streamline their call handling service and provide better patient care.

At that time, to limit the impact on the clinic and ensure that other duties could be performed, a dedicated number for results was created in the clinic which was answered for only two hours on each weekday afternoon; this was often very busy and difficult to get through on, leaving many patients frustrated. For those two-hours the call load was intolerable; valuable trained nurse and medical time was being used to simply answer calls and read out negative patient results.

Consequently there was not enough time to offer guidance and advice to those with positive test results. Analysis of the calls showed that over 80% of callers were being given good news - their results were negative, or they were told simply to continue with the medication as directed when they attended the clinic. As a result, the dedicated results phone line was replaced by results given out by letter - either posted to an address of the patient's choice, or collected in person from the clinic reception desk. This was

expensive in postage, and less acceptable to patients.

The Options

The GUM clinic needed to be able to offer a telephone option for obtaining results but streamline the patients' experience when collecting test results and move away from the routine of calling at specific times when nursing staff manned the results line. In addition, they needed to guarantee patient anonymity. Finally they wanted the patient to be able to call for their results from where they wanted and when they wanted. Various options were considered:

- Contacting only those who had positive results, 'no news is good news' approach - *this was considered to fall outside the 'Recommended standards for sexual health services'**;
- Distributing calls to several phones in the department to spread the load - *as the notes are kept in one central location, this was not practicable;*
- Sending SMS messages (texts) to patients' mobiles - *this was considered to be too insecure for sensitive information to be transmitted and was quite expensive.*

Alan approached various suppliers to see what they suggested - he decided that Telephonetics VIP was the company to work with. Alan says "I was very impressed with Telephonetics VIP's willingness to work with us to solve the problem in our GUM clinic. They didn't have an off-the-shelf solution but the Consultants in the GUM, Telephonetics

VIP and I worked together in a team to design what was needed. We are really delighted with the outcome."

The Solution - 97% of calls handled solely by Result

Telephonetics VIP provide an automated results solution called Result that enables patients to ring a specified number and hear results of any recent medical tests. Initially a trial was implemented, with a small sample of patients given the option of collecting their results by the automated phone service. The patients in the trial liked it, and the system soon went live to all patients. Now all patients receive their results in this way. The system fulfils the key requirements of patient confidentiality, convenience (available 24/7, from any phone), and freeing nurses' time - 97% of calls are handled solely by Result. The freed-up time is now used to provide improved patient care.

"Feedback from patients is that they are happy using the Result service, it has helped to reduce the number of telephone calls to the department, allowed better use of nursing time, and ensures patient confidentiality. The administration staff find the solution very easy to use and administer. In addition, we are able to find out how many patients have called into the system to listen to their results and then hung up and how many were transferred to make a follow up appointment. This helps in us to plan and utilise our resources more efficiently."

* 'Recommended standards for sexual health services', published by the Medical Foundation for AIDS and Sexual Health.

Telephonetics VIP is a leading provider of hosted and customer premises speech recognition and voice automation solutions. From voice diallers that automate the operator function and deliver hands-free mobility, to MovieLINE[®], our cinema information and booking system, we have consistently demonstrated our ability to deploy market tailored speech solutions into very demanding environments,

delivering real business benefits to our customers. Our solutions for self-service, call steering, mobility, outbound messaging and business continuity deliver all the potential that speech has to offer.

Telephonetics VIP – making sound business sense for over 13 years for public sector and corporate clients including Global 1,000 customers.

About NHS Lothian

NHS Lothian provides a comprehensive range of primary, community-based and acute hospital services for the populations of Edinburgh, Midlothian, East Lothian and West Lothian. It provides services for the second largest residential population in Scotland - circa 800,000 people; to do this it employs nearly 28,000 staff.

► **The Result System**

The Result system now handles all the calls to the Clinic from patients collecting their results. This is how the system works:

When a patient visits the clinic they are seen by a member of the medical staff and samples are taken, they are given a patient number and provide their date of birth. They are also given the special Result line number. At the same time they are told that their test results will be available approximately two weeks after the initial consultation.

When the test results are available they are reviewed by senior clinical staff who check that none of the results are unexpected, and decide whether the results should be read to the patient using the Result system.

The vast majority of results are deemed suitable to be put onto the system; they are entered by a member of the administrative staff. This takes just a few mouse clicks and is very straightforward.

When the patient rings the Result line they are asked for their patient number and date of birth. As soon as they enter these correctly their test results are read to them.

If it is decided to withhold the results when the patient rings the Result line they are told that their results are ready, and are asked to press "0" to speak to a health adviser. The call is then transferred to a member of the clinical staff.

The Result system can also deal with callers who ring before their results are ready, and with callers who ring a second time, often for reassurance or so that a partner can hear the results.

The system has been live since August 2005. It handles an average of between 100 and 200 calls on weekdays, and 20-40 each day at the weekend. Less than 3% of calls require any human intervention to either make an appointment or speak to a healthcare professional - a considerable saving in staff time.

As the Result system allows for call levels to be analysed, calls can be classed as:

30% of calls are from callers who ring before their results are ready

30% of calls are from people calling for results for the first time

30% of calls are from people who want to hear their results again or are calling for a new set of results that are not ready yet

10% of calls are from people who could not log on, for example because they don't have their patient number.

On average every caller creates three calls to the clinic, which, for all negative results, means that three calls *per patient* do not need to speak to medical staff. In positive cases, each patient now only speaks to a Health Adviser when their results are ready!

Benefits of the Telephonetics VIP Solution:

Patients can listen to their test results any time, day or night

During work hours the patient can press a button at any time to be transferred to speak to a nurse, if they want to

Results can be withheld from a patient so that they are only passed on by a suitably qualified member of the medical team

Patients can also be transferred to the appointments desk to make a follow up appointment, if required

Frees up nursing time to concentrate on more complex duties.

The Future

Since installing the Result solution NHS Lothian have implemented the Telephonetics VIP ContactPortal, an advanced call management solution that is controlled using speech recognition technology. It is Alan's intention to roll out the Result solution to more sites throughout NHS Lothian. Alan concludes, "I have found Telephonetics VIP extremely professional and helpful throughout all stages of the development, installation and implementation of both the ContactPortal and Result solution. All their staff have demonstrated a high degree of professionalism at all levels throughout the organisation, which has made our job much easier and kept us on track!"

