

The Potentially Avoidable Appointment Audit

exploring how general practice might be, rather than the way it is now

The new fully automated Potentially Avoidable Appointment Audit is free for all practices in England as the cost of developing and running the audit have been funded in full by NHS England as part of the General Practice Forward View. The audit is a simple tool for reviewing workload within practices and exploring how things might be managed differently in the future. So far, more than 1,000 GPs across 400 practices have audited their appointments. All practices can register for the audit by going to <https://pcfaudit.co.uk/login> And to find out more about why practices are using the audit, results so far, changes they have made, and case studies, go to <http://www.primarycarefoundation.co.uk/overview-of-the-audit.html>

This audit was developed as part of a research project commissioned by NHS England and the initial results were published in **'Making Time in General Practice'** available at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/gp/gpfpv/workload/releasing-pressure/> It helped create the evidence base for the 'Forward View for General Practice'. On average, just over 20% of GP appointments were identified as potentially avoidable if other services and support were put in place.

How the audit works

It is designed to help practices look at their current workload and how it could be managed in a way that reduces pressure on the clinical team. The audit tool helps GPs, nurses and other clinicians identify different types of potentially avoidable appointment, from people who you think don't really need to be seen at all, to those who need better advice and self-care, to patients who could be seen by other members of the practice team, or by other services such as pharmacies, or patients who have non-medical needs that would be better met by different types of support in the local community. The audit provides clear evidence of how you work in your practice, rather than relying on assumptions and anecdote, and offers potential options for reducing your workload. The real benefit is generally found in the discussion and debate across the practice team as you explore differences in the way you work, make sense of the results, and think about the best way to make improvements. For more information go to the Frequently Asked Questions at https://pcfaudit.co.uk/facts_and_questions

Has the audit led to changes in the way practices work?

Practices have reported a wide range of changes made in practices after the audit, including: extending skill mix, re-organising appointments systems, introducing care navigation and setting up arrangements with local pharmacies to deal with minor ailments. It has also been used across larger groups of practices working together as a way of setting the agenda for the wider healthcare system and influencing funding decisions.

What individual practices have said about the avoidable appointment audit:

"The audit was a catalyst for change – it was a starting point of a journey for improving the way we work. The results, supported by a discussion within the clinical team, provided a basis for accessing local transformation funds and to a national award from the Self-Care Forum for our collaborative work across three practices with our Patient Reference Groups

and voluntary sector partners to plan a year of Self Care activities locally. It has also led to establishing a social prescribing project with Age UK supporting older people to build social connections despite the challenges of poor transport in a rural community.”

Philippa White, the Practice Director, Upton Surgery

“The interesting thing is that it made us think about differences in how we work and how we might do things in new ways. The audit is, of course, subjective, how could it not be – the idea of what is avoidable will mean different things in different practices – but at a time when we are drowning in work we need to look at how to do things differently and that’s what made it useful. We had already started thinking about making changes, but the data helped confirm what we should do, and it was important to have data to back things up. The audit was also very easy to do - being open on the screen at the end of each consultation – it quickly became second nature.”

Elizabeth Phillips, GP and Practice Lead for Quality Improvement, Yardley Wood Health Centre, Birmingham

“We are starting to use care navigation - as there are many things can be easily dealt with by a HCA or Practice Nurse - and this will help ensure that patients see the right person in the clinical team. Patients often think that they need to see a GP but, actually, it is not always necessary.”

Julia Moseley, Business Partner, St Nicholas Group Practice, Burnley

“The practice found the summary audit report very helpful. The main surprise was that despite initial concerns about the levels of avoidable appointments, the actual proportion identified was lower than in other practices. It is important to have real data rather than anecdotal evidence, so that was helpful and a good result. It was also time efficient for me as a practice manager as I didn’t need to chase people up. It is invaluable to have a clinical perspective.”

Fiona Hinton, Business Manager, The Market Surgery, Aylsham

“Following the audit we felt better informed to move ahead with care navigation. We decided to offer further training to the reception team designed to increase their confidence in directing work away from GPs. We also set up a call queuing system and a welcome message from one of the GPs asking patients to give details of their appointments so that they can be directed to the right member of the team.”

Charlotte Brown, the Assistant Manager, The Surgery, Haslingden