



**Silicon Practice**  
DIGITAL HEALTH SOLUTIONS



# Boosting patient engagement and practice efficiency: a guide to high performing GP websites



**NHS backed  
insights and  
best  
practices  
for a digital  
first NHS**

Prepared by



**Silicon Practice**  
DIGITAL HEALTH SOLUTIONS

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# Executive Summary



In the digital age, a GP practice's online presence is no longer a luxury, but a necessity. Your website is often the first interaction a patient has with your practice, serving as a crucial tool for accessing services, information and support. In today's NHS, which is increasingly driven by digital technology, a high performing website is essential for enhancing patient experience, streamlining practice efficiency, and ultimately, contributing to improved health outcomes.

However, many GP websites are underperforming. They may be challenging to navigate, lack vital features, or fail to meet accessibility standards, leading to patient frustration and increased pressure on practice resources. Recognising these challenges, the NHS has released a comprehensive, [step-by-step guide](#)<sup>(1)</sup> to aid practices in improving their online patient journeys. This guide offers a structured approach to website enhancement, covering everything from initial planning and benchmarking to content improvement and ongoing maintenance.

This white paper, with insights from the NHS guide and expertise from Silicon Practice, aims to highlight the critical role of GP websites in the modern NHS. We will delve into the key findings from the NHS evaluation, showcase best practices in website design and functionality, and illustrate how high performing websites are making a positive impact in GP practices nationwide.

## Key benefits of a high performing GP website

- Enhanced patient access to services and information
- Reduced administrative burden through streamlined processes
- Improved care navigation and online support
- Increased patient engagement and satisfaction
- Better alignment of resources with patient needs

## White paper overview

- The evolving landscape of primary care and the digital imperative
- NHS guidance as a framework for GP website excellence
- Key elements of a high performing GP website
- Real world case studies of successful GP websites
- Silicon Practice: Your partner in digital transformation

In the following sections, we will explore these topics in detail, providing you with the knowledge and insights you need to transform your GP website into a valuable asset for your practice and your patients.

# The evolving landscape of primary care and the digital imperative



Primary care is in the midst of a significant transformation, driven by increasing demand, evolving patient expectations and the rapid advancement of digital technology. In this dynamic environment, GP practices face the challenge of delivering high quality care while managing growing pressures on resources and capacity. Embracing digital solutions is no longer a choice but a necessity for practices seeking to thrive in this new era.

## The rise of digital health



The demand for digital access in healthcare has been steadily rising in recent years, with patients increasingly expecting the same level of online convenience and self-service they experience in other aspects of their lives. This trend has been further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the need for remote access to healthcare services and information.

A recent survey found that 61%<sup>(1)</sup> of patients used their GP website in 2023, indicating the growing importance of online platforms in primary care. Patients are turning to GP websites for a variety of reasons, including:

- Booking and managing appointments
- Requesting repeat prescriptions
- Accessing medical records
- Seeking health information and advice
- Contacting their GP practice

## The shift towards patient self-service



As patients become more digitally savvy, they are increasingly seeking greater control over their healthcare journey. They want to be able to access services and information quickly and easily, without having to rely on traditional methods such as phone calls or in-person visits. This shift towards patient self-service is driving the need for GP websites that offer a range of online tools and resources.

A well designed website can empower patients to manage their own care more effectively, leading to improved engagement and satisfaction. By offering online appointment booking, repeat prescription requests and access to medical records, practices can reduce the administrative burden on staff and free up valuable time for patient care.

## The GP website: a crucial tool for meeting evolving needs



In this digital-first NHS, a well designed website is no longer just a nice-to-have, but a crucial tool for meeting the evolving needs of patients and practices. It serves as the digital front door of the practice, providing a convenient and accessible way for patients to engage with their healthcare providers.

### A high performing GP website can help practices to:

- **Improve patient access:** Online platforms provide 24/7 access to services and information, making it easier for patients to get the care they need, when they need it
- **Reduce administrative burden:** Online self-service tools can automate routine tasks such as appointment booking and prescription requests, freeing up staff time for more complex tasks
- **Enhance communication:** Websites can be used to share important updates, health information and advice with patients, improving overall communication and engagement
- **Improve care navigation:** Online resources can guide patients to the most appropriate services for their needs, ensuring they receive timely and effective care
- **Increase patient satisfaction:** By providing a convenient and user friendly online experience, practices can improve patient satisfaction and build stronger relationships

## Why choose digital



The evolving landscape of primary care demands that GP practices embrace digital solutions to meet the changing needs of patients and the healthcare system. A well designed website is a crucial tool for achieving this goal, providing a platform for patient self-service, improved communication and enhanced access to care. By investing in a high performing website, practices can position themselves for success in the digital future of the NHS.



# NHS guidance: a framework for GP website excellence

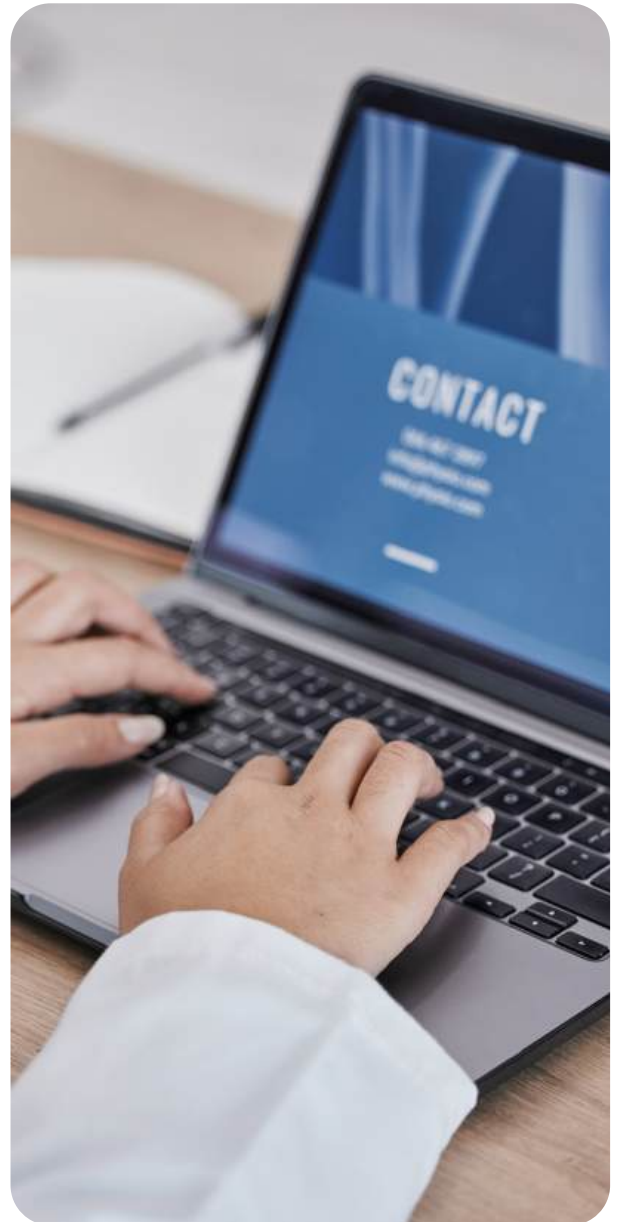
Recognising the critical role of GP websites in modern primary care, NHS England has developed a comprehensive, step-by-step guide to support practices in improving their online patient journeys. This [guide<sup>\(1\)</sup>](#), titled "Improving General Practice Website Online Journeys," provides a structured framework for website enhancement, covering all aspects from initial planning to ongoing maintenance.

## The purpose of the NHS guide

The NHS guide aims to empower practices, Primary Care Networks (PCNs), GP Federations, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and other relevant organisations to create highly usable and accessible websites that meet the needs of both patients and practice staff.

### It offers practical advice and resources to help practices:

- Understand the key elements of an effective GP website
- Benchmark the usability of their current online patient journeys
- Develop and implement a plan for website improvement
- Deliver and maintain ongoing website enhancements



## Four stages of GP website improvement



The NHS guide outlines a four stage approach to GP website improvement, emphasising that this is a continuous process rather than a one-time project. These stages are:

## Stage 1: Plan



This stage focuses on laying the groundwork for a successful website improvement project.

### Key tasks include:

- Leadership and initial goal setting
- Information gathering and needs assessment
- Identifying necessary skills and expertise
- Benchmarking the existing website(s)
- Creating a comprehensive plan for improvement

## Stage 2: Improve



In this stage, the practice focuses on enhancing the website's content and functionality.

### Key tasks include:

- Understanding the principles of usable and accessible content
- Creating and testing written content
- Improving key pages and features first
- Reviewing and streamlining existing webpages

## Stage 3: Migrate



This stage involves moving the website to a new template or platform, if necessary.

### Key tasks include:

- Comparing available GP website templates
- Choosing a template that meets the practice's needs
- Purchasing the new template and associated services
- Migrating content and launching the new website

## Stage 4: Maintain



The final stage focuses on ensuring the website remains effective and up-to-date over time.

### Key tasks include:

- Assigning roles and responsibilities for website maintenance
- Establishing processes for content review and updates
- Implementing mechanisms for data access and analysis

## Key tasks within each stage

Each of the four stages outlined in the NHS guide includes a series of key tasks to help practices navigate the improvement process effectively. These tasks are designed to be flexible and adaptable to the specific needs and circumstances of each practice.

### Examples of key tasks include:

- Conducting a thorough website audit
- Identifying areas for improvement
- Prioritising key pages and features
- Developing a content strategy
- Selecting a suitable website template
- Migrating website content
- Implementing accessibility best practices
- Training staff on website management
- Monitoring website performance



## Available NHS resources

To further support practices in their website improvement efforts, the NHS provides a range of valuable resources, including:



- ☐ **GP website benchmark and improvement tool<sup>(2)</sup>**: This tool helps practices assess the usability of their current website and identify areas for improvement
- ☐ **NHS England written content templates<sup>(3)</sup>**: These templates provide pre-written content for key webpages, ensuring accuracy and consistency with NHS guidelines
- ☐ **NHS content guide<sup>(4)</sup>**: This guide offers comprehensive advice on creating effective website content that is accessible and user friendly
- ☐ **Hemingway editor<sup>(5)</sup>**: This tool helps practices check the readability and reading age of their website content
- ☐ **GP website template comparison research<sup>(6)</sup>**: This resource allows practices to compare different website templates and choose one that aligns with their needs

## Simplifying the improvement process

By following the step-by-step guidance and utilising the available resources, GP practices can simplify the website improvement process and ensure a successful outcome. The NHS framework provides a clear roadmap for practices to follow, while the various tools and templates help to streamline specific tasks, saving time and effort.

The NHS guidance and resources provide a valuable framework for GP practices seeking to enhance their online presence. By embracing this guidance and leveraging the available tools, practices can create high performing websites that meet the needs of patients, improve efficiency and contribute to the delivery of high quality care in the digital age.



# Key elements of a high performing GP website



A high performing GP website is essential for delivering quality care in the digital age. It serves as a virtual front door to your practice, providing patients with convenient access to services, information and support. To ensure your website meets the needs of your patients and your practice, it's crucial to focus on the following key elements:

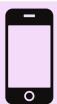
## Usability



Usability refers to how easily and effectively patients can use your website to achieve their goals. A usable website is intuitive, efficient and satisfying to use. Key aspects of usability include:



**Clear navigation and site structure:** Patients should be able to find the information they need quickly and easily. Use clear and concise menus, labels and headings. Organise your content logically and ensure that key pages are easily accessible from the homepage



**Mobile friendly design:** More and more people are accessing the internet from their smartphones and tablets. It's crucial that your website is responsive and adapts to different screen sizes



**Fast loading speeds:** Patients are likely to abandon a website that takes too long to load. Optimise your website's performance by compressing images, minimising code and leveraging caching



**Easy to use search functionality:** A prominent and effective search bar can help patients quickly find specific information or services

## Accessibility



Accessibility is about making your website usable for everyone, including people with disabilities. This is not only a legal and ethical obligation, but also a way to ensure that all your patients can access the care they need. Key aspects of accessibility include:



**Compliance with WCAG guidelines:** The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines ([WCAG](#))<sup>(7)</sup> provide a set of internationally recognised standards for web accessibility. Ensure your website meets these guidelines to make it accessible to people with a wide range of disabilities



**Screen reader compatibility:** Screen readers are software programs that allow people with visual impairments to access website content. Make sure your website is compatible with screen readers by using appropriate HTML tags, providing alternative text for images and ensuring that content is well structured



**Alternative text for images:** Alternative text (alt text) is a description of an image that is read aloud by screen readers. It's important to provide descriptive alt text for all images on your website so that people with visual impairments can understand the content



**Appropriate font sizes and colours:** Use font sizes and colours that are easy to read for people with visual impairments. Ensure sufficient contrast between text and background colours

## Content



The content on your website should be relevant, accurate and easy to understand. It should also be tailored to the needs of your patients. Key aspects of content include:



**Patient-centred language (reading age 9-11):** Use plain English and avoid jargon. Write in a way that is easy for your patients to understand, regardless of their education level



**Accurate and up-to-date information:** Ensure that all the information on your website is accurate and up-to-date. Regularly review and update your content to reflect any changes in your practice or in healthcare guidelines



**Use of NHS content templates:** The NHS provides a range of content [templates](#)<sup>(8)</sup> that you can use to ensure your website content is accurate and consistent with NHS guidelines



**Emphasis on key patient tasks (appointments, prescriptions etc.):** Make it easy for patients to complete key tasks such as booking appointments, requesting repeat prescriptions and accessing their medical records

## Functionality



Functionality refers to the features and tools that your website offers. A functional website provides patients with the online tools they need to manage their healthcare effectively. Key aspects of functionality include:



**Online appointment requests:** Allow patients to request appointments online, 24/7. This can save time for both patients and staff



**Repeat prescription requests:** Enable patients to request repeat prescriptions online, reducing the need for phone calls or in-person visits



**Access to online consultation tools:** Provide access to online consultation tools that allow patients to communicate with their GP remotely



**Secure messaging with the practice:** Offer a secure messaging platform for patients to communicate with their GP practice about non-urgent matters



**Integration with the NHS App:** Integrate your website with the NHS App to provide patients with seamless access to their health records and other NHS services

## Security



Security is paramount when dealing with sensitive patient information. It's crucial to ensure that your website is secure and protects patient data. Key aspects of security include:



**Data protection and patient privacy:** Comply with all relevant data protection regulations and ensure that patient data is handled securely and confidentially



**Secure online forms:** Use secure forms and encryption to protect patient information when they submit online forms

By focusing on these key elements, you can create a high performing GP website that meets the needs of your patients, enhances practice efficiency, and contributes to improved healthcare outcomes.

# Silicon Practice: your partner in digital transformation

At Silicon Practice, we understand that your GP website is more than just an online presence. It's a vital tool for engaging with patients, streamlining practice operations and delivering high quality care in the digital age. With our expertise in GP website design and development, we can help you create a website that meets the unique needs of your practice and your patients, and that's why we are in the top 3 GP website suppliers<sup>(9)</sup> in the UK.

## Introducing Foundation

Foundation is a robust Website Patient Navigation System, built from years of expertise in primary care web design. Aligned with the NHS Design System and Content Style Guide, it incorporates patient and practice feedback alongside tested improvements.

With specialised NHS blocks, a mobile first design and intuitive drag-and-drop editing, Foundation ensures seamless integration with NHS resources, enabling efficient online consultations and self help access. Its user friendly interface simplifies navigation, streamlines tasks and enhances patient engagement.

Foundation is more than a website - it's a powerful digital platform designed to transform patient care and practice efficiency.



Foundation sites are targeted to achieve a 98% rating of the top NHS<sup>(10)</sup> benchmark at launch.



# Why choose Foundation?

## Foundation conforms to NHS web guidelines



Foundation sites are targeted to achieve a <sup>(10)</sup>  
98% rating of the top NHS benchmark at launch

## WCAG 2.1 Level AA Compliant



We prioritise meeting the highest WCAG guidelines, to ensure that all patients, regardless of sight, hearing, or mobility issues, can access our digital resources conveniently and inclusively

## Specialised NHS blocks



NHS blocks allow you to present pre-set cards of information in concise, eye-grabbing formats and easily group related topics and links together

## Foundation provides mobile first design



Designed as mobile first, but equally at home on tablets, laptops and desktops

## Simplified drag & drop editing



Instantly make changes without technical knowledge — these can be reflected across every site in the ICS, ICB, locality or PCN

## Integration with NHS self-help information



Optimise patient care with effortless signposting through seamless integration with NHS self-help information

## Easy to navigate interface



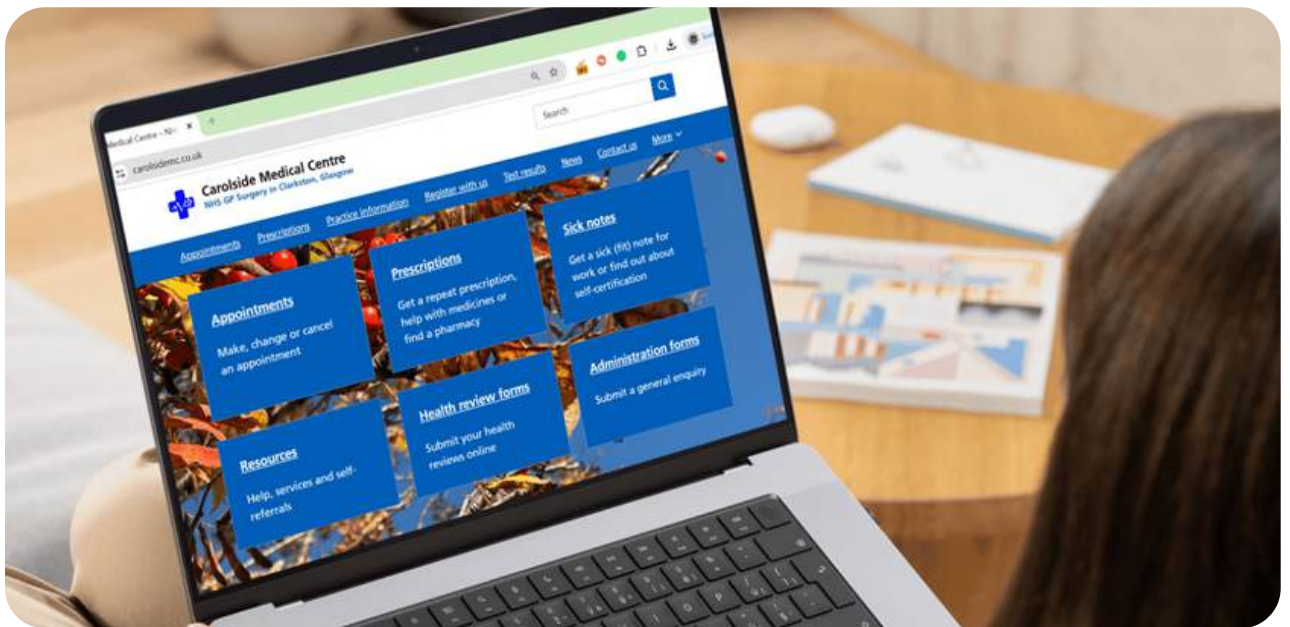
Uncluttered and proven interface enables patients to complete tasks rapidly

## Foundation websites are NHS driven



Foundation websites reflect NHS guidelines for providing online consultations and the latest healthcare advice while having the potential for so much more





## Make your system future-proof with tailored modules

Create a holistic healthcare solution customised to your requirements, with our selection of specialised modules. These include easy-to-use forms helping reduce pressure on phone lines and front desks, eHubs which enhance collaboration, EHR integration complete with SNOMED-CT coding and much more.

### Forms



Choose from our suite of 50+ pre-built forms — everything from registering patients online to recording blood pressure and other health reviews, fit note requests and cancelling appointments. Practices can restrict access out of hours or when exceptionally busy.

### Integration with Clinical Systems



Send an episode directly from the dashboard to the patient record, send SNOMED-CT coded data into the clinical system, send attachments such as images into the clinical system, enable patient verification against the PDS.

### Video consultations



Start video consultations directly from the dashboard, inviting patients by SMS or email. Clinician is always in full control of consultation, can notify patients of delays, take screenshots and make notes

### eHub



Create additional dashboards for collaborative working with pharmacies, physios or care homes. Requests can be handled centrally but the practice can still track progress, schedule and route requests

### Advanced Dashboard



Already trusted and in use by hundreds of practices daily, the latest Silicon Practice dashboard enables patient verification against PDS and full auditing of actions.



## Experience working with NHS guidelines and best practices

We have extensive experience working with NHS guidelines and best practices for GP websites. We understand the importance of compliance with accessibility standards, data protection regulations and other relevant guidelines. Our experience includes:

- **NHS Digital Service Manual:** We are familiar with the NHS Digital Service Manual and ensure that our websites comply with its guidelines
- **WCAG guidelines:** We adhere to WCAG guidelines to ensure that our websites are accessible to people with disabilities
- **Data protection:** We implement robust security measures to protect patient data and comply with data protection regulations

### Examples of successful GP websites

We have developed a range of successful GP websites that have helped practices to improve patient engagement, streamline operations, and enhance their online presence. Here are a few examples:

- **Carolside Medical Centre**<sup>(11)</sup>: This website features online appointment requests, repeat prescription requests, and access to self-referral information. It has helped the practice to reduce phone calls by 30% and improve patient satisfaction
- **Black Country ICB**<sup>(12)</sup>: The 29 websites are designed to be highly accessible to people with disabilities and have helped the practices to improve access to care for all patients, saving over 34,700 phone calls or visits to Black Country Practices Reception in its first year

## Support services

We offer a range of support services to help you get the most out of your GP website. Our services include:

- **Content creation:** We can help you create high quality website content that is relevant to your patients and optimised for search engines
- **Website maintenance:** We can provide ongoing website maintenance to ensure that your website is up-to-date and secure
- **Training:** We can provide training to your staff on how to use your website and content management system.

## Your partner in digital transformation

We can help you create a high performing GP website that meets the needs of your patients, enhances practice efficiency, and contributes to improved healthcare outcomes.



# Real world success stories



## OUR JOURNEY WITH CAROLSIDE MEDICAL CENTRE: FROM CHALLENGES TO TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

This follow up case study highlights our shared journey and demonstrates the enduring impact of our collaboration, from the initial challenges to continued success.

### Early Impact

- A 30% reduction in phone call volumes within the first six months, achieved while maintaining robust controls that allow practices to manage the flow of online requests effectively
- Improved demand management, with staff able to triage more effectively
- Enhanced patient access to self-help resources, reducing unnecessary appointments

*"Admin staff really like being able to mix things up between answering calls and dealing with online requests. We are able to create preset responses meaning that online forms are quicker to deal with and we provide consistent messaging. Patient feedback has been very positive."*

### LINDSAY BRYNES

Practice Manager,  
Carolside Medical Centre

### Initial challenges

- High telephone call volumes, placing pressure on staff and patients
- Inefficiencies in triaging and managing patient demand
- A need to modernise operations to meet growing expectations, while maintaining accessibility for all demographics

### Continuing the Journey

#### Phone Call Management

Despite a growing patient list, phone calls have maintained a steady 30% reduction, demonstrating the practice's ability to balance traditional and modern communication methods.

#### Patient Form Insights

- 68% of "Request an appointment with the doctor" requests result in appointments
- 77% of nurse or HCA appointment requests are accommodated
- Practices retain complete control over the system, including the ability to pause or manage online forms based on current capacity

#### Engaging All Demographics

The system is designed to accommodate varying literacy and IT skill levels, ensuring accessibility for patients with disabilities and those from underserved communities. For example:

- Deaf patients benefit from online options
- Blind patients can rely on traditional phone access
- The combination of phone and online forms ensures no patient is left behind

#### Demand Trends

In March 2022, a 15% increase in demand was managed effectively, demonstrating the platform's capacity to handle varying patient needs without overwhelming staff.

### Looking Ahead

Carolside Medical Centre's sustained progress highlights the transformative power of our partnership. Our future plans include:

- Enhancing analytics tools to support GPs in demand management, enabling them to make data-driven decisions

Our partnership is about helping GPs manage demand effectively while ensuring accessibility for all patients. By giving practices the tools to control their workflows, we are fostering efficiency and inclusivity without overwhelming resources.





**Silicon Practice**  
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# FOOTFALL SAVES OVER 34,700 PHONE CALLS OR VISITS TO BLACK COUNTRY PRACTICE RECEPTIONS IN ITS FIRST YEAR

WITH KATIE BULLIMORE, DIGITAL FIRST PROJECT MANAGER, NHS BLACK COUNTRY ICB

## BLACK COUNTRY ICB BACKGROUND

Katie Bullimore, Digital First Project Manager for NHS Black Country, shares her experience of using FootFall and Foundation across practices in her ICB has helped support both practices and patients. There are 29 practices using Silicon Practice products in an area serving 1.26 million residents.

## THE CHALLENGE

The initial challenge was that the 29 practice websites were not to NHSE mandated standards. In addition some of the practices were not implementing online consultations to their patients, thus increasing in-person appointments that contributed to a long backlog.

## THE IMPLEMENTATION

Online Consultation



Comprehensive Forms



Customisation



User-Friendly Interface



Patient Digital Triage



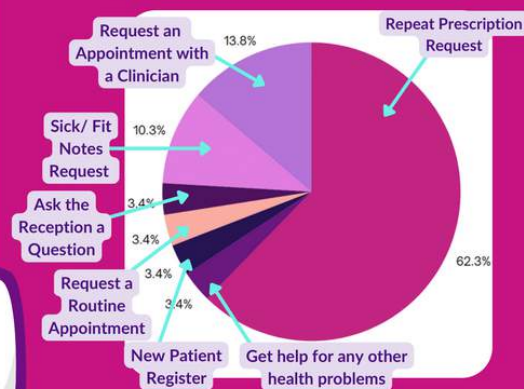
Footfall Connect



## RESULTS

- 342, 658 forms completed across the ICB in one year, saving on average 34, 749 phone calls or physical visits to the practice reception
- 77, 729 forms completed over the winter months, taking pressure off the practices at their busiest time
- Most Practices within the ICB experienced a 20% increase in completed forms, showing a large rise in patients adopting digital healthcare solutions and so taking the strain off of the reception

### Digital Requests breakdown



"Personally, I feel that Silicon Practice are professional and offer a well-managed service. Their products and services are well designed and well supported. When they introduce a solution, the implementation is managed and controlled, every aspect is thought about."

Katie Bullimore, Digital First Project Manager.

"Footfall has an easy to use and intuitive staff portal. I like the quick responses as they save time. Footfall connect is so useful for sending the data to EMIS directly."

Sam, Clinical Administrator, Eve Hill Medical Practice.

"I think this is a brilliant system. Each time I have used it I have had a reply within a very short time"

Patient, Eve Hill Medical Practice.

# Embracing the digital future of primary care

In today's rapidly evolving healthcare landscape, a high performing GP website is no longer a mere advantage - it's a fundamental necessity. As we've explored in this white paper, the digital realm has become an integral part of primary care, and your website serves as the virtual front door to your practice, playing a pivotal role in patient engagement, efficient operations and the delivery of quality care.



## Key takeaways:

Let's recap the key takeaways from this white paper:

- **The digital imperative:** The demand for digital access in healthcare is on the rise, with patients increasingly expecting online convenience and self-service options
- **NHS guidance as a framework:** The NHS provides a comprehensive framework and resources to guide GP practices in improving their websites, ensuring they meet the needs of both patients and staff
- **Key elements of a high performing website:** Usability, accessibility, relevant content, robust functionality and stringent security are the cornerstones of an effective GP website
- **The benefits of a well designed website:** A high performing website can enhance patient access, reduce administrative burdens, improve communication and contribute to better care navigation

## Partnering with Silicon Practice

At Silicon Practice, we understand the challenges and opportunities that GP practices face in the digital age. We're committed to helping you harness the full potential of your website to achieve your practice goals and deliver exceptional patient care.

Here's how partnering with Silicon Practice can benefit your practice:

- **Expertise and experience:** We bring a wealth of expertise in GP website design and development, with a deep understanding of NHS guidelines and best practices with more than 1000 GP practices already rely on Silicon Practice's solutions
- **Tailored solutions:** We work closely with you to create a website that reflects your practice's unique identity, goals and patient needs
- **Patient-centric approach:** Our focus is on creating websites that are user friendly, accessible and provide a seamless experience for your patients
- **Ongoing support:** We offer comprehensive support services, including content creation, website maintenance and training, to ensure your website remains effective and up-to-date

The digital future of primary care is here, and it's full of potential. By embracing digital solutions and investing in a high performing website, you can position your practice for success in this evolving landscape. Silicon Practice is here to guide you on this journey, helping you create a website that empowers your patients, streamlines your operations and enhances the quality of care you provide.

**Ready to take your GP website to the next level?** Contact Silicon Practice today to learn more about how we can help you embrace the digital future of primary care.



# Contact Us

Phone

01793 710500



Email

enquiries@siliconpractice.co.uk



Website

siliconpractice.co.uk



Address

Schappit Ltd  
Unit 26, Oak Business Centre  
79-93 Ratcliffe Road, Sileby  
Loughborough, Leicestershire  
England, LE12 7PU



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