



October 2005

Case study – sending sensitive results to patients using secure online text messaging

After nine months in service the Sandyford Initiative¹ surveyed patients to ask how they felt about getting the 'all clear' via text message

Introduction

With their pioneering service the Sandyford Initiative, Glasgow's centre for sexual and reproductive health, has proven the effectiveness of an SMS text message results service saving time and money whilst improving patient service.

Background

In Nov 2004 the Sandyford Initiative in Glasgow launched a pilot service to help the clinic get 'all clear' test results to patients whilst also reducing the pressure on frontline staff answering calls from patients anxious to know their results.

Sandyford Initiative piloted texting an 'all clear' message in Nov 2004. An initial audit of the pilot in Feb 2005 revealed concerns over non-receipt of texts, and that some clients had not been made aware of the text service at their initial appointment. These were addressed and the pilot rolled into a full service.

How the system works:

We now perform some 1500 STI screens per month and send about 1100 automated messages. Clients who undergo any STI test are given a small card with the exact text of the message they will get and give specific consent to be contacted by mobile. All STI results are returned to our clinic management system. Exactly two weeks later we extract results using Crystal Reports to compile a list of mobile numbers of people who have a complete set of negative results and have no outstanding results. This list is uploaded to the txttools browser. A key part of this process is the SQL-coded algorithm to make sure we only send 'all clear' messages to people who genuinely are OK. The two week limit gives us time to contact people with unexpected positive results.

The audit

In Sept 2005, a random sample of 200 clients who had been texted their results were texted with the request:

"Hi, this is the Sandyford Initiative – would it be ok for someone to call you with a very short questionnaire about the results texting service?"

The phone interview was structured with responses on a five point scale

200 text requests for interview were sent

70 (35%) replied

63 (90%) agreed to telephone interview and 7 (10%) declined

50 clients were interviewed

13 (26%) of those interviewed did not receive their text message* and had either already phoned the results helpline or were given their results during the interview.

37 (74%) received results by text

2 (5%) of those who received their text were not informed at time of testing.

4 clients received 2 texts (this occurs e.g. if testing happens on consecutive visits)

**Initial process problem since resolved.*

Response from clients who had received results by text (n=37)

100% understood the text

100% found texting a most acceptable method of contact

100% would be most happy to have future results by text

100% thought that for them receiving results by text was most confidential

Response from clients who had not received results as expected (n=13)

100% would have found texting a most acceptable method of contact

100% would be most happy to have future results by text

100% thought that receiving results by text would be most confidential

Client Comments

"Great not having to phone for results"

"Don't know how I'd feel about getting positive results by text"

"Great idea because you can get a text wherever you are"

"Was not told to expect a text but was delighted to get it – thanks to all the team"

"Getting a text is great as long as you are told you will get your results that way"

“Very happy with service”

Conclusions

- With appropriate information at the time of testing, texting is a very acceptable method of getting an all clear message. Clients see this as a confidential and useful service. Only 2 clients had received an unexpected text.
- Some clients did not get the expected message: this is now resolved.
- Texting clients to seek permission for a phone interview for service evaluation is also a useful approach. Although the response rate of 35% was a little disappointing we felt this respected clients right to privacy if they wished not to hear further from us. We now seek explicit consent to contact clients for service and research purposes at registration.
- There remains some concern from clients about routine contact for positive results.

100% of patients found text messaging to be “a most acceptable method” for getting results

The service has enabled the clinic to provide all patients who have negative results with an ‘all clear’ message. In the past, due to pressure of work, clients had to rely on ‘no news is good news’ or called into a busy phone line. The new service ensures people are aware they are sexually healthy and reduces stress and worry and frustration calling up for results.

The service was launched using SMS text message healthcare market leader txttools², using their browser-based, automated SMS text tool based upon the medtxt application suite, and tailored for specific use in the healthcare industry. The tool integrates with many PAS systems used throughout the NHS. With a cost per text message of just 10 pence, medtxt can be set up to contact patients according to the preferences of the individual healthcare specialist. Any information exchanged will automatically be updated to the patient record, ensuring these are always accurate and up-to-date. While similar services are currently available for General Practitioners, Sandyford is among the first to use automated bulk text messaging for an NHS sexual health service.

Sandyford performs around 1500 sexual infection screens each month and sends out about 1100 ‘all clear’ messages. Sixty-three randomly selected patients who responded to an enquiry text agreed to a short mobile phone interview. All said that texting was acceptable, confidential and would be happy to collect results this way in future.

Dr Andy Winter of the Sandyford Initiative said: "With the majority of the population carrying a mobile phone, 70% of whom actively send and receive text messages; we

knew this was an ideal opportunity to increase the efficiency of the clinic and service provision. We believed text messaging to be discreet, and are glad that our patients agree it is acceptable and confidential. We worked with txttools to deliver a system that fits the special requirements of the service. We take care to make sure patients are informed about the text service at the time of testing and seek specific consent to use their mobile number." He continues "I believe the results of our survey prove that we were right. Our phone helpline is now freed up for people with concerns rather than just getting routine results. Other clinics are now taking great interest in this as they are able to save clinic time, and therefore money, by improving workflow and communications."

Steve McCann of technology partner txttools says "The technology is now available to potentially reshape the way we communicate simple messages within the NHS. Furthermore, it is proven to have a significant positive impact in other areas of the public sector such as education. By intelligently integrating mobile technology within their existing healthcare IT systems, Sandyford is making the provision of healthcare services more efficient and accessible."

Participants

Aileen Spiers, Research Nurse

Chris Thow, IM&T service manager

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Notes

¹ About the Sandyford Initiative

The Sandyford Initiative provides sexual and reproductive health services for women, men and young people in Glasgow, as well as counselling, information and a range of specialist services. The Sandyford Initiative is part of NHS Glasgow, and supported by Glasgow City Council. All services are free of charge, and available without the need to be referred by a doctor or another practitioner.

Full details at www.sandyford.org

² About Cy-Nap

"mobile technology helping people to manage their lives"

Cy-nap are setting the industry standard in SMS text messaging in healthcare.

txttools™ is a brand of Cy-nap Ltd, the company was established in January 2001 and is the result of over 14 years of innovation within the technology market.

meditxt® has been developed specifically for use in hospitals, clinics and surgeries

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