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Impact Inclusion Innovation Investment

Analogue to digital

DECODE: Understanding the impacts of remote consultations in primary care

ARC West

The challenge
Primary care is facing a workforce crisis and ever greater demand from patients. Digital health tools, including alternatives to face-to-face consultations and access to electronic medical records, are seen by policymakers as a potential solution to growing demand. The increase in the use of digital health tools could lead to unexpected consequences, both positive and negative.

The approach
The DECODE project aimed to understand the unintended impacts of online triage systems and patient access to medical records in GP practices. The ARC West team interviewed and ran workshops with patients, GPs and practice staff, and developed case studies. This work led to guidance and training for primary care staff and was included in the NHS England toolkit for implementing online GP consultations.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK Government instructed GP practices to conduct all consultations remotely unless there was urgent need for a face-to-face appointment. ARC West researchers led the RAPCI project to understand how GP practices responded to the rapid implementation of remote consultations.

The outcomes and impact
This produced a series of rapid reports for commissioners and primary care decisionmakers at key points during the pandemic. Findings were included in reports to SAGE, the RCGP, NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care to inform their COVID-19 response.

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