

CASE STUDY

Improving access with patient portals

The patient portal at Pakuranga Medical Centre (PMC) has saved time and increased efficiency for the practice and its patients, resulting in improved access and a better patient experience.

A patient portal is a secure online facility that allows patients to access their health information at any time and from anywhere with access to the internet. At PMC, patients can use the portal to make appointments, order prescriptions, access test results, and view health information, such as their recalls, allergies and immunisations.

Pakuranga Medical Centre introduced the portal into their practice to relieve pressure on the telephone system and increase access for their patients.

General manager Dale Shepherd led a multi-pronged approach to encourage patient uptake of the portal:

- Posters promoting the portal – including promotional posters PMC designed, step-by-step guides for enrolling on the portal, and advertising posters from the portal vendor, Connectmed – and portal uptake data were displayed in prominent areas around PMC.
- Authority forms for patients to provide their details and sign were made available near the posters.
- The telephone message was changed to redirect patients to the portal.
- Promotional information was photocopied onto the back of invoices and statements, and instructions for ordering prescriptions online were put on the back of prescriptions.
- Reception and clinical staff talked to patients about the portal.
- Staff used iPads to sign patients up for the portal in the waiting room.

“Over 6,000 of our enrolled population of 13,000 patients are on the portal. So we’re doing quite well,” says Ms Shepherd. “On busy days, like Mondays, over half our appointments are now made online.”

The portal has saved time for the practice and its patients alike.

“Staff are keen to promote the portal because it makes their job easier and frees up their time. It’s reduced telephone traffic and made prescriptions quick and easy. It’s also reduced double-handling of test results. Now, when the doctors get a patient’s results, they can put them straight onto the portal – there’s no need to hand them to the nurses to contact the patient. It’s a lot quicker and more efficient,” says Ms Shepherd.

For patients, the portal means easy, convenient access to healthcare and personal health information, as well as a feeling of greater control.

“Mums with little kids love it. If their child is unwell during the night they can secure an early appointment without having to worry about getting through in the morning. And, if their child feels better, they can cancel the appointment online too. That’s very helpful to them. It’s also convenient for people work full-time. They love being able to re-order prescriptions or check test results online rather than having to ring in or find time to attend an appointment.”

Ms Shepherd says the next steps for PMC are to make consultation notes available and open online consultations.

“We want to open up as much information as possible on the portal. Patients like the portal and we have the information, so why not make it available? It’s their information.”
