Greater
Manchester
Integrated Care
Partnership

The use of online appointment and triaging platforms through the pandemic has been well-documented. Such platforms have not always got the best reputation amongst patients and there is some variation in operational capability and patient experience. Some practices feel ill-equipped to effectively manage online platforms, leading to less promotion of the tools (in some cases switching them off) and a drop-off in patient use levels as a result.

The picture for online systems where the communication is instigated by the practice – for example, text links that ask patients to send in photos – is more positive.

This points to the need to choose online platform with care – to reflect local ways of working (for example, a triage-based approach or a multi-skilled reception team or a two-tier operational model). The best way to begin is to write a series of user statements:
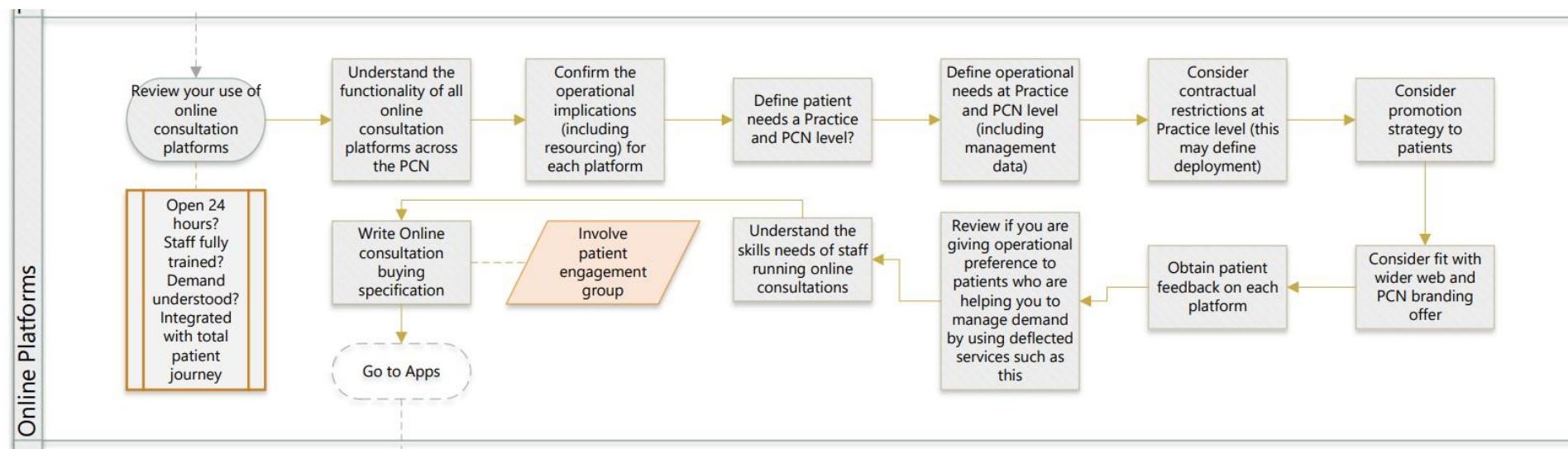
Process 7. Successful Online Platforms

Online Appointment Platforms

Quick Check: Is there a strong online solution in place?	Yes	No
Is there a simple, easy to use, easy to register online consultation solution?		
Is online consultation an integral part of the patient offer?		
Is online consultation actively promoted?		
Does the reception team have the skills it needs to support online consultation?		
Answered no to any question? Consider making some changes		

Sample user statements

Who	Experience
Receptionist	I want to see patient enquiries in one controllable space/ I want to be able to manage the demand in a way that supports our GP and clinical team. I want the interface to be easy to use
Triaging GP	I want the new system to be fully integrated with our medical system. I want to be able to log outcomes quickly. I want to manage the low urgency, volume-based content with ease. I want to instruct non-medical staff to complete some of the work
Patient	I want an easy-to-use system. I don't want to be asked endless amounts of questions

Online Appointment Platforms

Whether it is possible to achieve these things will be a matter of solution capability and a factor of cost. Make sure the final user statements are included in any supplier contract as this will be invaluable if, later down the line, the solution doesn't do what the sales rep said it would.

It might sound obvious but take the time to understand the full breadth of the online solution's capability, decide which functionality to activate and avoid duplicate functionality (this may mean switching off some legacy systems and an associated communication plan to patients).

Online platforms are key to the "those who can, should be asked to" policy. 100% uptake should never be a target as even those who are digitally literate will have times when they need to pick up a 'phone or see a clinician in person.

The Nexer Review of Patient Access found:

"User confusion is exacerbated by multiple logins, since users are unsure if they have registered or not."

Source: Nexer Group Research commissioned by Health Innovation Manchester