

GP Practices using Skype for Business

A group of GP practices in South Wales have been delighted with a new tool to assist them in effective communications between themselves, and within their surgeries.

The GP 'Skype for Business' tool makes communication between Practice Managers and their staff and health boards considerably easier.

"It's an extremely useful and powerful tool" said Business Manager at Risca Surgery, Gareth Thomas.

"We're spread around different places, so when we need to call a meeting, it can be difficult to get everyone together, but Skype fixes that"

"We wouldn't be without it now"

Risca Surgery in Newport is one of nine practices to receive the tool as part of a pilot project, before it is rolled out across all practices in Wales in 2018. Gareth and his IT manager Lynne Carter, have found it particularly useful as they have to manage four sites, with 25,000 patients.

"We wouldn't want to be without it now" Lynne said "We use it every day – the instant messaging is really helpful, we use it more than e-mail for communicating between managers"

Using Skype for group meetings and messages has made a significant difference to the staff in Risca.

"The convenience of being able to call an instant meeting is a big advantage, sometimes I need to discuss things with people straight away - if there's been a significant event – or if something's happened in a practice that has to be communicated out to people" Gareth explained.

When a user searches for a contact on Skype it displays the contact's availability, as it links to their calendar - another feature Lynne and Gareth have found particularly useful.

"I can instantly see who's available," Lynne said, "It's really helpful, partly because you know you're not interrupting people"

Planning a national conference

Another practice using Skype is Ashgrove Practice in Pontypridd. Business Manager, Moira Moore said Skype has helped her to find some extra time in her day;

"The benefits for me personally has been far more manageable time in my busy day, and in addition it's allowed me to have a more richer and effective discussion with my colleagues when planning".

Moira, together with Gareth in Risca, is part of a group of Practice Managers who organise an All-Wales Practice Managers Conference, and have used Skype to plan the conference.

“Previously we would have to travel somewhere central to us all to plan the conference, but this year we could have meetings via Skype, and even share documents with it, it’s made a tremendous difference” she said.

The reduction in the need to travel is seen as one of the biggest advantages of the tool, “Particularly of late, with the traffic and road issues, it’s saved us a lot of time,” Gareth said.

“People can work from home, and easily communicate, it feels like the modern way of working” explained Lynne.

Linking with wider communities

Gareth has also found it’s helped with working as part of a wider team, “The Practice Managers role is quite isolated”, he said “we don’t have much communication with peers, and it’s a useful tool to have for National Practice Managers Meetings.”

Gareth also contributes to national projects working on IT solutions for GPs, and has been able to contribute to meetings without having to leave his surgery,

“Sometimes I need to be here,” he said “dealing with patient queries, staff or doctor queries, or a health board issue. But now I can participate in the national IT meetings without having to travel.”

As with any new IT tool, Lynne found some reluctance within the practice for the change, “Some people were worried a new tool would mean extra work they wouldn’t have time for, but after the initial set up, they couldn’t praise it enough” she said.

Gareth added “Some of our GPs were worried this would mean consultations with patients via Skype, but for other GPs, particularly young GPs, they expect us to have tools such as Skype”.