

National Green Theatres Programme Action for Adoption

Using telephone and video conferencing appointments to support reducing NHS Scotland's carbon footprint December 2023

About

This information raises awareness about this carbon-saving action. There is no formal requirement to report on this action through the National Green Theatres Programme, however Boards are encouraged to consider how they are adopting this action ensuring they are connected with any relevant initiatives or national work streams.

Background

Patient and staff travel account for a significant proportion of NHS Scotland's in-direct carbon footprint, particularly in more rural areas, where public transport options are limited.

Until recently, in-person appointments have been the norm, however COVID-19 meant alternative ways of reviewing patients such as an appointment by telephone or video, were needed.

Whilst this shift in practice was introduced initially as a necessity, it can be viewed as an opportunity to expand the forms of healthcare delivery options that are available which can reduce the requirement for clinicians and patients to travel.

Virtual Appointments

Video consulting has been embedded in remote practice, such as in island Boards, for some time, with the pandemic accelerating the use in other health boards. Whilst there are limitations to what can be delivered by telemedicine, patients' value having this option available to them where practicable.¹

Virtual appointments offer a number of anticipated co-benefits:

- Reducing transport miles and costs;
- Reducing time off work;
- Increasing patient satisfaction.
- Reducing travel miles means a reduction in carbon emissions.

In the NHS Scotland Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy: 2022-2026, the Scottish Government has committed to reducing the need for patients to travel, through the continued use and expansion of Near Me and other forms of remote consultation where it is clinically appropriate.

¹ [Patient Satisfaction with Tele- and Video-Consultation in the COVID-19 Era – A Survey of Vascular Surgical Patients - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

Near Me system

Near Me is a video consulting service that allows attendance at health and care appointments remotely rather than face to face, (provided by Attend Anywhere).

Use of Near Me in the provision of health and care appointments increased during the pandemic, and whilst the annual number of appointments has since dropped back, Near Me is becoming embedded as a tool in the suite of appointment options.

Potential Carbon Savings

Based on data provided by the Near Me Programme Team, the table below shows the national carbon reduction achieved through the use of Near Me appointments for the last 3 financial years.

Calculations are based on the following assumptions:

- Miles saved – based on average 36 mile round trip:
- Medium car, unknown fuel = 0.26791 kg CO₂e / mile²

Year	No of Near Me Appointments	Miles Saved	Carbon Savings (tCO ₂ e)
2019	8,712	313,632	84.03
2020	595,825	21,449,700	5,746.59
2021	777,267	27,981,612	7,496.55
2022	465,362	16,753,032	4,488.30
2023 (Jan – May)	158,244	5,696,784	1,526.23

In order to mitigate the negative contribution that NHS Scotland has on the carbon emissions of Scotland, Boards should fully maximise the use of virtual appointments, where appropriate. This will hopefully see a reversal in the trend of decreasing use of this resource.

How to Measure Savings

By reporting on the proportion of consultations taking place virtually rather than in person, Boards will be able to measure the impact of using Near Me, see below.

- **Number of pre/post-operative appointments carried out via Near Me** – Use data available via Boards' appointment systems
- **Travel distance saved by having a Near Me appointment** – Data can be captured via Near Me survey which is automatically presented to patients following their Near Me appointment.

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2023

Method of travel the patient would have used if travelling to an in person appointment can also be built into this survey.

Useful links and further information

[NHS Scotland Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy: 2022 - 2026](#)

[Near Me](#)

Contact us

If you have any questions about this action, please contact the National Green Theatres Programme by emailing gjh.cfsdgreentheatres@gjh.scot.nhs.uk.