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For immediate release

Teleclinics put enhanced patient experience first at Waitemata DHB

You've left work early to join your partner and child who are at North Shore Hospital waiting to see a specialist.

But there's been a breakdown on Lincoln Rd and it looks like you could be at least 20 minutes late.

Meanwhile the specialist appointment is due to start in five minutes.

What to do?

Imagine if you could simply pull over to the side of the road and dial in to a teleclinic?

That's exactly the kind of thing that's been happening as part of a trial at Waitemata DHB's Otorhinolaryngology (ear, nose and throat) division over the last couple of months – and with stunning effect.

Clinical Director Dr David Grayson says over 50 invited patients have opted for a teleclinic, or remote consultation, to see whether the option might be viable on a permanent basis in the longer term.

Just one participant has so far stated a preference for physical appointments in the future. The rest, Dr Grayson says, are delighted with the convenience of a video approach.

In one case, two parents dialed in from separate locations to discuss their child's referral to the service by their GP.

"It turned into a group meeting – which was really neat," Dr Grayson says. "This is another example of the DHB looking at ways to use technology to manage the demands of a rapidly growing population.

"Some patients don't necessarily need to come in and see us in order to have their issues or conditions managed adequately – especially if the appointment is a first assessment.

“That option is obviously there for them if they prefer. But the patient’s GP has already done a physical assessment and we have all of the notes on a screen in front of us - so it’s really business as usual.

“That said, it is also very simple to get someone to open their mouth in front of the camera if you do want to have quick look at their throat.

“The response from patients has been overwhelmingly favourable and we are now looking at how we might formalise this approach and continue with it on a regular basis.”

Waitemata DHB CEO Dr Dale Bramley says the teleclinics are among a raft of initiatives being explored and developed by the organisation in its efforts to deliver best care through the smart use of mobile and digital technology.

“We have two main priorities as a DHB,” he says. “The first is to maximise health outcomes for our community and the second is to give our patients and their families the best experience that we possibly can.

“This kind of thinking ticks both boxes and helps us, as the largest DHB in the country, to keep pace with the expectations of a fast-growing and digital-savvy population.”

Caption: Dr David Grayson says teleclinics provide a new level of convenience for patients who can dial in to his clinics remotely for their specialist appointment.

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