



Virtual Consultations for People with Learning Disabilities, their families and healthcare staff in Primary and Community Care. A co-design Study.

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[VC Study Webpage Link](#)



Public Summary:

People with learning disabilities often experience a greater number of health problems than people without learning disabilities. They also encounter more barriers to accessing health services, which may impact their health.

Primary and community care services are under great pressure to deliver timely healthcare. Use of virtual consultations (VC) may play an important role in improving access to health and facilitate better care, at times needed by their patients. VC is contact with healthcare professionals by video/telephone call and email.

This study explored the potential of VC to enable people with learning disabilities, their families and support workers to use them in a way that best meets their needs. We also wanted to explore how a range of healthcare staff can best deliver care to meet these needs virtually, to complement face-to-face care.

We observed 3 online video consultations between people with learning disabilities, their family members or support workers and staff in primary and community care.

We also undertook 34 interviews with patients, family members, support workers and healthcare staff in south-east England. We made a film from the interview clips and showed it at five events where we talked with our participants about the study findings and worked together to create helpful resources.

This study was supported by several community partners including Active Prospects, Your Healthcare, Surrey Coalition of Disabled People, ProActive Community (Kingston), halow.

Findings from the study suggest several areas impacting patients' or healthcare staff's use of virtual consultations. These include:

- Having choice and supporting preferences
- The importance of support
- Building online relationships and feeling connected
- Quality and safety of VC
- Communication, rapport and visual cues
- New ways of working for healthcare staff
- Work & wellbeing (skills and confidence)

Based on these findings, the project intends to develop a range of resources (see overleaf).



Public and Community Involvement:

This was a co-design study, and we have worked with a range of experts by experience (8 in total) throughout the project. We worked with our experts flexibly at different times to give us advice and feedback on different stages of work. For example, advising about the content of the story-telling film, and more recently, planning and advice about how the co-design workshops should be run (when, where, how etc). Working with our experts has been key to our learning and ability to secure good-quality data. We will continue to work with our community partners and experts as we refine our project outputs listed below.

Dissemination:

We are currently developing a range of resources for healthcare staff and people with learning disabilities. These are:

1. **Best Practice Guidance & Toolkit**
2. **A Resources Guide**
3. **A Virtual Consultation Passport** for people with learning disabilities and their families/support workers.
4. **Advice & Top Tips Sheet** for people with learning disabilities and their families/support workers

We are developing our outputs and have a publication plan in place. Dissemination of outputs will be with local/regional, and national networks we developed throughout this study. We will reach out to these networks to promote outputs and gain further feedback to support resources development.

Impact and Implementation:

Learning from this study has the potential to:

- To improve digital inclusion, and access to healthcare for people with learning disabilities/families.
- Improve ways of working and integration of care between healthcare teams.
- Improve the quality of interaction and communication for all virtual consultation participants.
- Provide an additional way to offer and deliver routine, non-urgent care (i.e. support parts of Health Checks) to complement existing face to face care delivery.

Further impact activities will take place at a later date when the project outputs have been finalized and project findings have been published.

Publications

We envisage publishing 3 articles from this research. One paper is a commentary paper, in which we will share our learning on how to successfully use co-design methods with people with learning disabilities. The second paper will be based on the observational and interview data, and the final paper about the film development and co-design events.

What next?

We intend to grow this work by developing a future study to further explore our findings at a national level.

We will attend international conferences/visits to disseminate the project findings and to explore future opportunities for collaborative research.