

Background

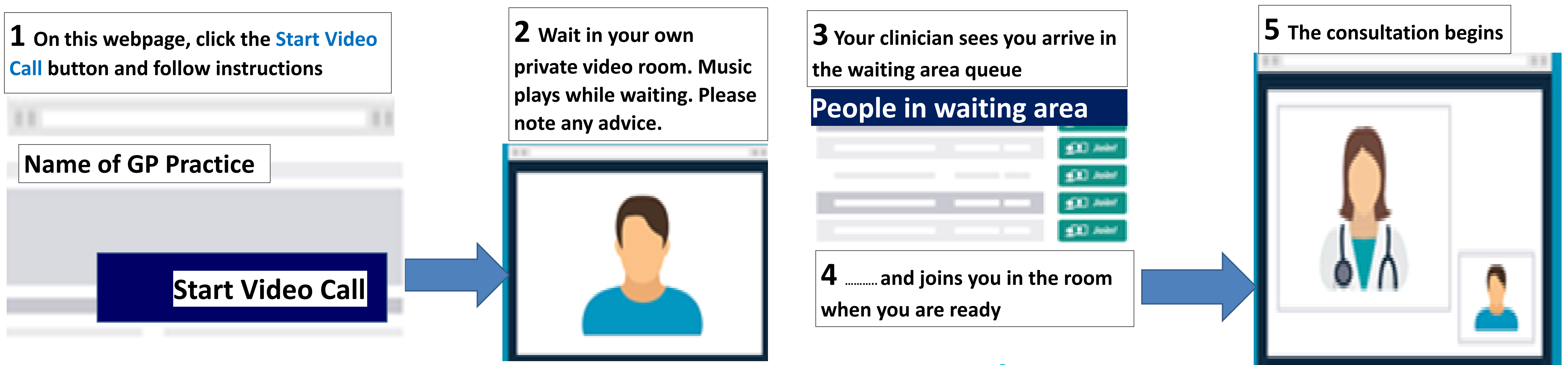
More people than ever communicate through the internet, at work, socially & managing everyday life - increasingly using online visual communication such as Skype and FaceTime.

Growing demands on GP services mean new ways of providing patient care are being considered. Video consultations via the internet is one of them.

Aim

- (i) To assess the feasibility, acceptability and utility to patients and primary care clinicians of consulting by video (VC) over the internet.
- (ii) To assess the potential differences between VC consultations, telephone consultations (TC) and face-to-face consultations (FTFC).

ViCo used an NHS Scotland backed system called Attend Anywhere nhs.attendanywhere.com/resourcecentre/Content/ResourceCentre.htm



Project Outline/Methodology

We installed VC equipment in six GP practices in NHS Lothian. GPs and nurses audio-record follow-up consultations conducted by FTFC (n=51), TC (n=53) and VC (n=45).

We chose follow-up consultations, as a diagnosis had previously been made, no physical examination was needed.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with clinicians (n=13) and patients (n=21) about their views on VC. Questionnaires were completed by clinicians (n=144) and patients (n=118) about their consultation experience.



Results

- Clinicians & patients were generally positive about consulting by video
- Patients opting for VC were younger and experienced in online tools such as Skype & FaceTime
- Clinicians & patients thought VC was helpful for working people, people with mobility and mental health problems
- VC was considered superior to TC in having visual contact, building rapport, reassurance, and improving communication
- Technical problems existed and this impeded some VC
- Recorded consultations showed VCs & TCs had similar length but were much shorter than FTFCs, addressed fewer problems & showed less information exchange
- Clinicians felt future VC must be significantly improved & seamlessly integrated with IT appointment systems for routine use

Conclusions

VC has certain distinct advantages over TC. When integrated with current systems it will provide an alternative to FTFC where a formal physical examination is not required e.g., discussing test results, medication changes and mental health. In these circumstances, VC offers major time savings to patients over FTFC, especially for working people. Rising ownership of smart devices & experience of video-calling will increase demand for such services.

