



Healthcare
Improvement
Scotland

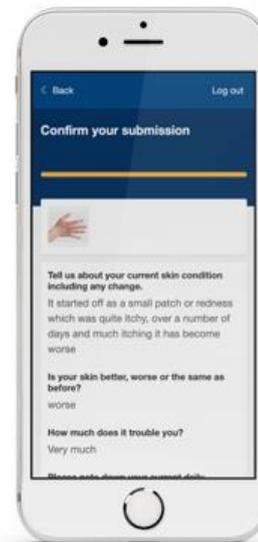
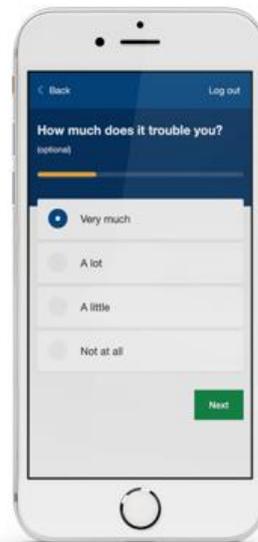
SHTG
Advice on health
technologies

Innovative Medical Technology Overview: Plain Language Summary

IMTO 05-21

October 2021

The Scottish digital dermatology appointment service
(DDAS).



What is dermatology?

Dermatology is the branch of medicine that diagnoses and treats patients with skin conditions. Patients see a dermatologist for help with skin conditions such as severe acne, psoriasis, eczema, and suspected skin cancer.

What is the Scottish digital dermatology appointment service (DDAS)?

The DDAS is an online dermatology clinic. Patients submit photographs (digital images) of their skin condition using a smartphone or computer, and answer six questions to help describe their symptoms. A dermatology specialist looks at the images and proposes further tests or a treatment plan. The dermatology expert can send messages to the patient via their smartphone or computer if they need more information. The patient and their general practitioner (GP) are then informed of the next steps (further appointment, tests or treatments). All patient data shared on the DDAS is protected as part of the General Data Protection Regulations and the DDAS system complies with all the relevant standards for storing patient data.

What is innovative about the DDAS?

The DDAS is the first system of its kind in Scotland. It allows patients to submit their own images of their skin condition instead of waiting for an appointment to be seen or to have pictures taken. It automatically updates patient medical records with their DDAS appointment information at the hospital and at their GP surgery.

What we did

We examined the available evidence about the performance of the DDAS system from trials in three areas of Scotland. Since the DDAS is quite new, most of the evidence we looked at came from the people who developed the system and the dermatology teams who used it during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What we found

Between April 2020 and March 2021, 2,510 patients had a DDAS appointment across the three test areas. Actions taken by the dermatology experts after reviewing patient submissions on the DDAS included referring the patient for another appointment (virtual or face-to-face), referring the patient for surgery, and providing advice and guidance on managing the skin condition at home.

There are costs associated with setting up the DDAS in each health board, plus additional annual and maintenance costs. The NHS is currently charged £3.00 per DDAS appointment.

Surveys among a small number of patients appear to show that patients found the DDAS easy to use. Patients reported finding that the DDAS reduced the need for travel and taking time off work to attend appointments.

What did we consider when developing this IMTO?

We considered the possible effects the DDAS could have on access to dermatology appointments, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included the potential benefits for people needing a dermatology appointment and the costs or savings for NHSScotland associated with using the service.

What are our conclusions?

Evidence from three areas in Scotland demonstrated the value of the DDAS, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, where it helped patients to access dermatology services. It is likely that the DDAS service will continue to support NHSScotland dermatology services as they begin the process of recovering from the pandemic and addressing the resulting long waiting lists for specialist care.

The DDAS has the potential to bring benefits to patients who cannot afford to take time off work or to travel long distances for a face-to-face dermatology appointment.

Future work

Future work on DDAS should consider:

- investigating how effective DDAS appointments are compared with face-to-face appointments
- comparing the number of patients using the DDAS and the number of patients preferring face-to-face appointments
- the impact of the DDAS on patient waiting times as part of NHS service recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic
- the effect of the DDAS on the number of face-to-face dermatology appointments needed in each health board
- the impact on clinician time of providing DDAS, face-to-face, and Near Me appointments, and
- the costs or savings with DDAS in addition to face-to-face appointments compared with face-to-face appointments only.

This plain language summary has been produced based on IMTO 05-21, October 2021