

# Whatever happened to all those attempts to change access to General Practice?



Access to General Practice:  
Innovation, impact and  
sustainable change

## GP-SUS Access systems activity debrief.

### The activity

This activity is a simple and quick matching game (that can be used as an icebreaker) that provides some foundational knowledge about the different ways that patients can obtain an appointment with a GP.

### Access systems in earlier research

Research on GP access systems has sought to inform service delivery by evaluating specific approaches to managing requests for GP appointments, notably the use of digital technologies to support access. A range of different systems have been studied in previous research. These include:

- **Advanced Access** focuses on seeing patients on the day they make contact and limits how far ahead patients can book appointments.
- **Telephone Triage** refers to systems that use phone-based assessment and prioritisation prior to booking an appointment. Variants include systems where patients discuss their problem with a GP or a nurse in the first instance, and those which restrict this to GP-led triage.
- Systems that offer phone, online, video, email and/or SMS routes to appointments.

**Tid Samme Dag (Time Same Day)** in Denmark offers a same day appointment and advance pre-booking, with 'light touch' triage by reception staff.

### Examples from our data

Woman in her 50s comes to the desk. "Can I make an appointment?" The receptionist smiles, delighted, and says, "Yes you can. I have just had some released." The patient asks if she can see one of two named doctors. The receptionist says "yes" and offers a time three days from now which the patient accepts. Field note

Receptionist is dealing with a call. She says, "I'm going to book you on a triage list to call you back this morning." Field note

Receptionist says "I'll put you in for one of our clinicians to give you a call-back and if they need to, they will ask you to come in." Field note

"We have very much overwhelmingly a same day service. ... either telephone call or face to face appointments with a duty doctor." Staff quote

Incoming e-consultations appear on [the administrator's] screen. He needs to go through them and assign them to a GP for a routine appointment or the urgent care call list, or to a nurse or the physio clinic. Field note

### Take away message:

Different access systems share key features. Most attempt to manage demand and organisational outcomes (such as improving GP workloads). Few systems focus on improving ease of access for patients, patient satisfaction or health status.

