The Digital Front Door Project

ANIMA

healthwatch
Kent

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Executive Summary

Project Brief

The Digital Front Door, ANIMA, is a key component of the West Kent Health and Care Partnership's strategy to enhance the efficiency and accessibility of GP healthcare services within the Tunbridge Wells Primary Care Network (PCN). This initiative, evaluated by Healthwatch Kent in collaboration with the West Kent Health and Care Partnership, aims to streamline patient demand management and improve access to GP services.

Methodology

The evaluation was conducted in two phases: the first gathered baseline data on patient interactions with GP surgeries prior to ANIMA's implementation, while the second assessed the system's impact post-implementation.
The report encompasses findings from Phase 2 using phase 1 as a benchmark to measure the change post ANIMA implementation.

The participating four GP surgeries were: Speldhurst & Greggswood Medical Group, Kingswood Surgery, Lonsdale Medical Centre, and St Andrews Medical Centre.

Feedback was collected from 209 people (109 in phase 1 and 100 in phase 2) as well as 27 staff (in phase 2 only) across these surgeries from February 2024 to July 2024.

Key findings

There is a shift towards online booking via ANIMA which is now the most common method for contacting GP surgeries, overtaking traditional phone calls in Phase 1. The most reported waiting time has shifted from 'a week or more later' in phase 1 to 'same day' in phase 2.

With a 36% increase in Phase 2 for 'same day' appointments, 'next day' appointments have also increased from 5% in Phase 1 to 21% in Phase 2. Overall, almost half (47%) of the patients rated their experience with ANIMA positively, though 33% reported poor experiences.

General satisfaction with GP services remained high, with 89% of patients expressing a good overall experience. This is a 16% increase post ANIMA implementation. Patient concerns highlighted were faulty triage processes, difficulty in explaining medical problems digitally, loss of personal contact, additional steps required to access services, digital confidence issues among the elderly, and data security.

Suggested improvements included making the system more user-friendly, enhancing appointment scheduling, improving system navigation, and ensuring better accessibility for older patients and those with disabilities.

Staff feedback on ANIMA was mixed. Most felt confident using the system, though it did not significantly reduce their workload or stress levels but reduced the number of calls they now receive.

Benefits noted included better patient detail collection and improved appointment management, yet concerns about system accuracy, increased workload from duplicated tasks, and challenges faced by less patients who are not good with technology were prevalent. Suggestions for improvement by staff focused on inclusivity, system usability and reliability, enhanced training and collaboration, feature enhancements, and better workload management.

The feedback indicates that the Digital Front Door ANIMA has shown promising results in improving appointment accessibility and patient experience. While this initiative intends to improve the current landscape of patient accessibility, its unintended impact such as widening the gap of health inequalities must be taken into consideration through ongoing refinements and enhancement of the system's overall usability and inclusiveness.

Introduction

The Digital Front Door, ANIMA, is a key component of the West Kent Health and Care Partnership's strategy to enhance the efficiency and accessibility of GP healthcare services within the Tunbridge Wells Primary Care Network. This initiative, evaluated by Healthwatch Kent in collaboration with the West Kent Health and Care Partnership, aims to streamline patient demand management and improve access to GP services.

Health Services Safety Investigations Body (HSSIB) produced a report recently about patient and staff concerns over GP online consultation tools. The report explored the impact of online consultation tools on patient safety risks, likeliness to seek consultation, patient harm, under-reporting of incidents and exclusion of users from their design process.

Our evaluation of ANIMA was to gauge the impact of the new digital front door, ANIMA on patient accessibility to their GP surgeries and experience, and to identify potential areas for improvement based on people and staff's feedback.

This report presents a comprehensive summary of the findings in Phase 2 (ANIMA post implementation). Findings from Phase 1 have been taken in consideration to serve as a benchmark for which ANIMA's impact post implementation can be assessed.

Method

Participating GP surgeries

Four GP surgeries were selected to gather baseline data in Phase 1 and a follow up in Phase 2. These participating GP surgeries were Speldhurst & Greggswood Medical Group, Kingswood Surgery, Lonsdale Medical Centre, and St. Andrews Medical Centre.

Phases of engagement

The project's engagement was conducted in two phases: the first gathered baseline data on patient interactions with participating GP surgeries, while the second assessed ANIMA's impact post-implementation.

Phase 1

We gathered baseline data on patient interactions with GP surgeries prior to ANIMA's implementation. We collected data from people through a mixture of online surveys and face-to-face engagement.

Online survey links were distributed to patient participation groups of the GP surgeries. This approach facilitated the inclusion of individuals who might be potentially overlooked by face-to-face engagement efforts.

Between February 2024 and March 2024, 109 people were engaged across the four GP surgeries.

Phase 2

We gathered the follow up data on patient interactions with GP surgeries after the implementation of ANIMA in the participating GP surgeries. We collected data from people through face-to-face engagement only. We engaged with staff of the participating GP surgeries through online surveys.

Online survey links were distributed to Practice managers of participating GP surgeries to cascade to their staff.

Between May 2024 to July 2024, 100 people and 27 staff were engaged across the four GP surgeries in Phase 2.

In both phases, responses were elicited using a semi-structured questionnaire.

Findings

Demographics

We spoke to 100 people across the four GP surgeries in phase 2.
25 (25%) people in Speldhurst & Greggswood Medical Group,
25 (25%) people in Kingswood Surgery,
25 (25%) people in Lonsdale Medical Centre, and
25 (25%) people in St Andrews Medical Centre.

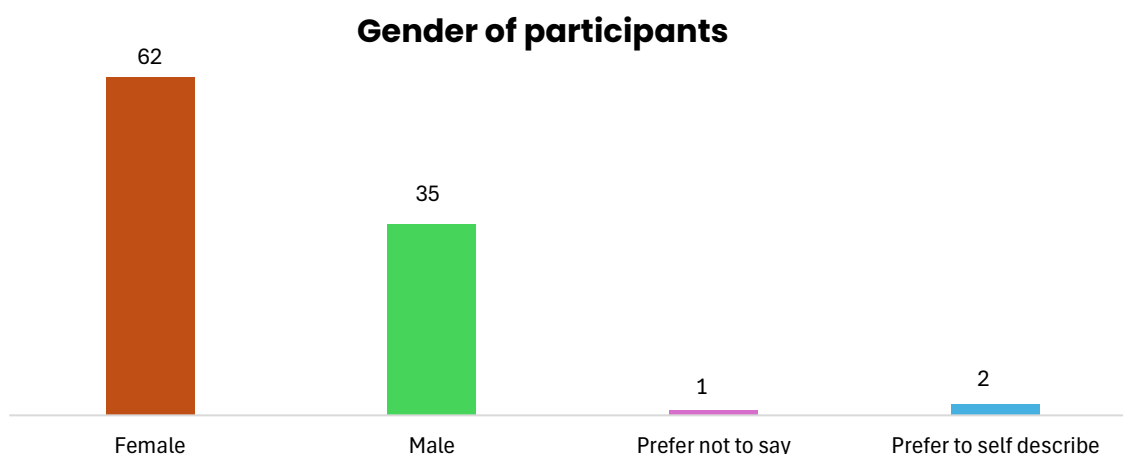62 female, 35 male, 2 people preferred to self-describe and one person preferred not to say.

Gender of participants

Female	Male	Prefer not to say	Prefer to self describe
62	35	1	2

Fig 1.0 Chart showing the gender distribution of the people we spoke to.

Participants' age varies, with the majority (25 & 24) of participants in the age range of 45-54 and 55-64.

Age range of participants

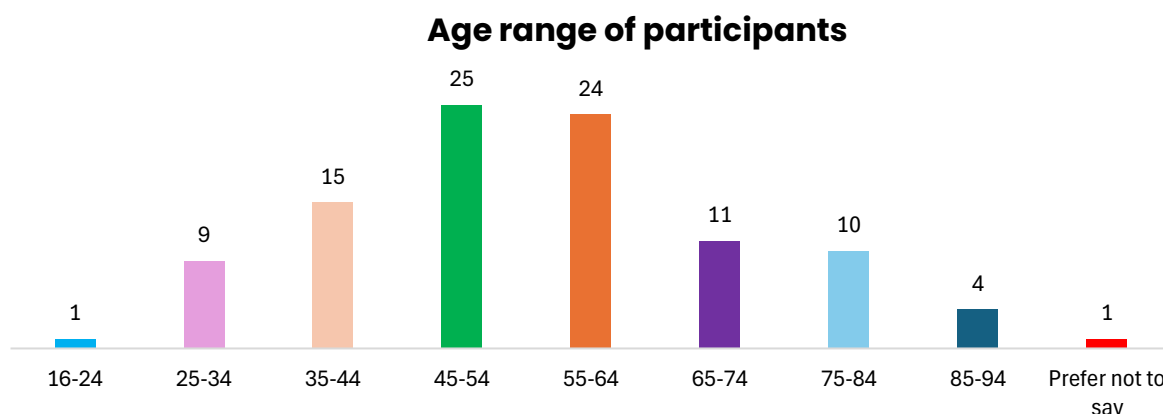| 16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85-94	Prefer not to say
1	9	15	25	24	11	10	4	1

Fig 2.0 Chart showing the ethnicities of the people we spoke to.

Most (87%) of the participants were White British with the remaining from other ethnicities as represented in fig 3.0.
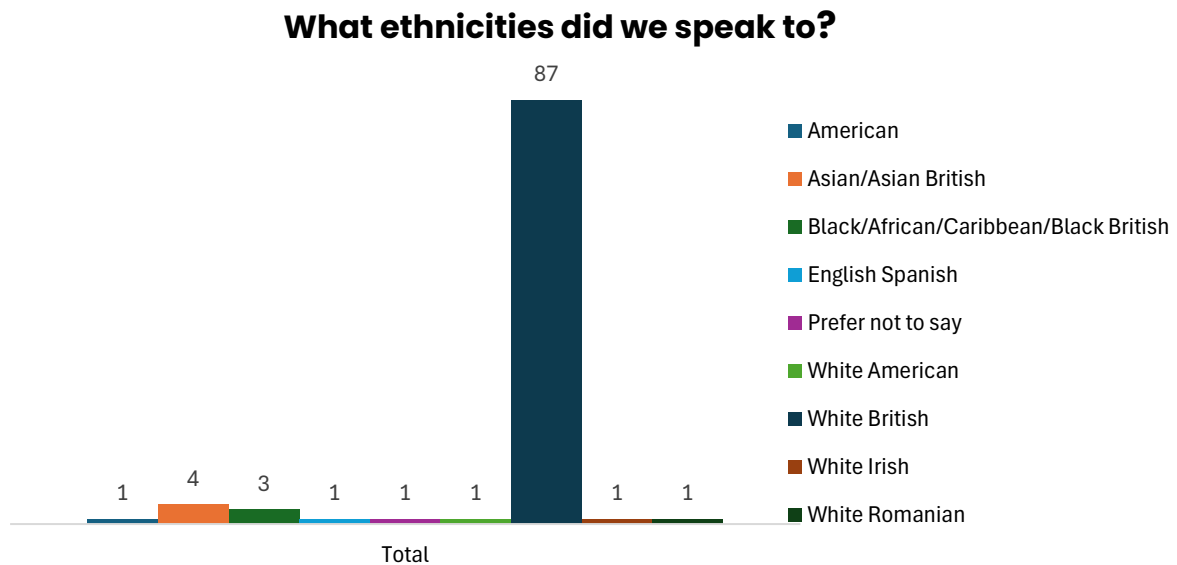
What ethnicities did we speak to?

Fig 3.0 Chart showing the ethnicities of the people we spoke to.

Typical contact method with GP surgeries

When people were asked about their typical method of contacting their GP surgeries for health-related issues since the adoption of ANIMA, we found that:

48% of participants contacted their GP surgeries via online booking (ANIMA)
43% contacted their GP surgeries via phone call
9% contacted their GP surgeries via walk-in.

Comparing this with phase 1 across the four GP surgeries (fig 4.0), we found that:
There was a 44% decrease in people contacting the GP surgeries through phone calls. There was a shift from 'phone call' to 'online booking via ANIMA' as the most reported contact method across the four GP surgeries.
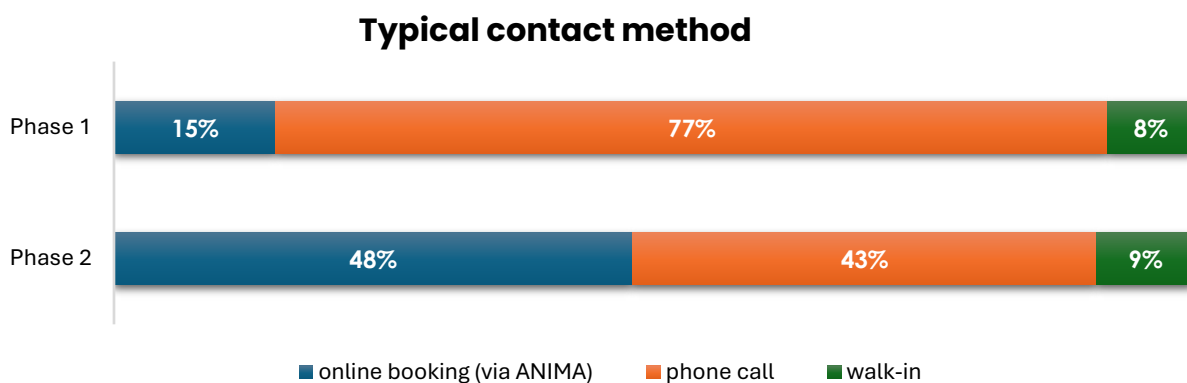
Typical contact method

Fig 4.0 Comparison of typical contact method across the four GP surgeries

Waiting time to get a booked appointment

Across the four surgeries, the most reported waiting time to get a booked appointment (fig 6.0) since the rollout of ANIMA was 'same day', reported by 31% of people.

Comparing this with phase 1 across the four GP surgeries (fig 5.0), we found that:
There was a shift of the most reported waiting time 'a week or more later' in phase 1 to 'same day' in phase 2.
'Next day' appointments have also increased from 5% in Phase 1 to 21% in Phase 2.

Waiting time to get a booked appointment

	A week or more later	Few days later	The next day	Same day	Can't remember
Phase 1	55%	9%	5%	23%	8%
Phase 2	21%	20%	21%	31%	7%

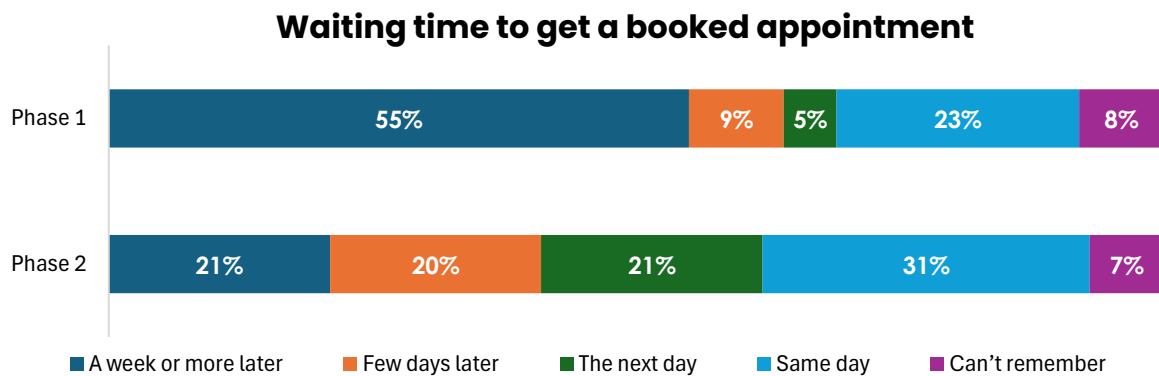■ A week or more later ■ Few days later ■ The next day ■ Same day ■ Can't remember

Fig 5.0 Comparison of 'appointment waiting time' across the four GP surgeries

Were people's appointment needs met?

We asked people if their appointment needs were met since their GP surgeries started using ANIMA. Out of 100 respondents, 70 (70%) reported that their needs were definitely met, 26 (26%) said their needs were met to some extent, and the remaining 4 (4%) were unsure whether their needs were met.

Comparing this with phase 1 across the four GP surgeries, we found that (fig 6.0):
There was a 17% increase in people's appointment needs being definitely met.
In both phases, there was no change in the number of people who reported that their appointment needs were met to some extent.
Although, 10% of people reported their needs were not met at all, no one reported this in phase 2. In both phases, 4% said they do not know if their needs were met at all.

Meeting the appointment needs of people

Phase 1	60%	26%	10% 4%
Phase 2	70%	26%	4%

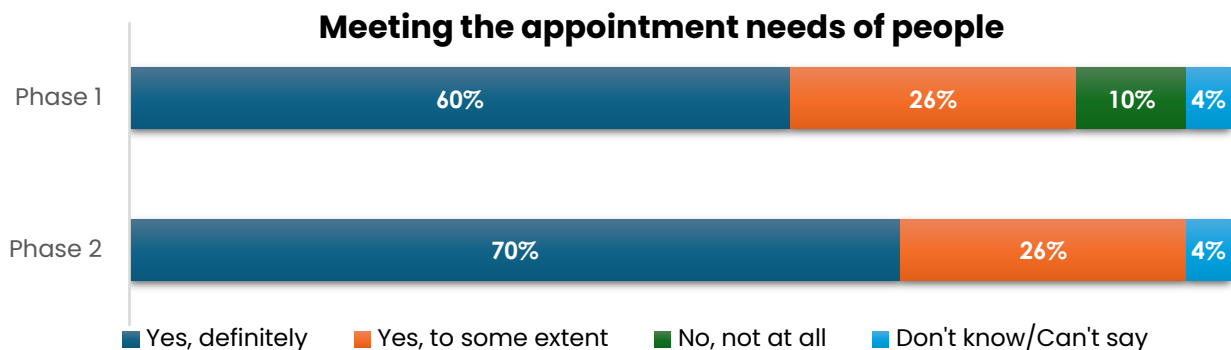■ Yes, definitely ■ Yes, to some extent ■ No, not at all ■ Don't know/Can't say

Fig 6.0 Comparison of 'appointment needs being met' across the four GP surgeries

Update on appointments

We asked people how they felt with the way their GP surgeries provide updates on their appointments. 86% of respondents were satisfied, 3% dissatisfied and 11% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Comparing this with phase 1 across the four GP surgeries, we found that (fig 7):
There was a 27% increase in people's level of satisfaction on appointment updates. There were reductions in number of people who were dissatisfied (7% to 3%) and neutral (25% to 11%).
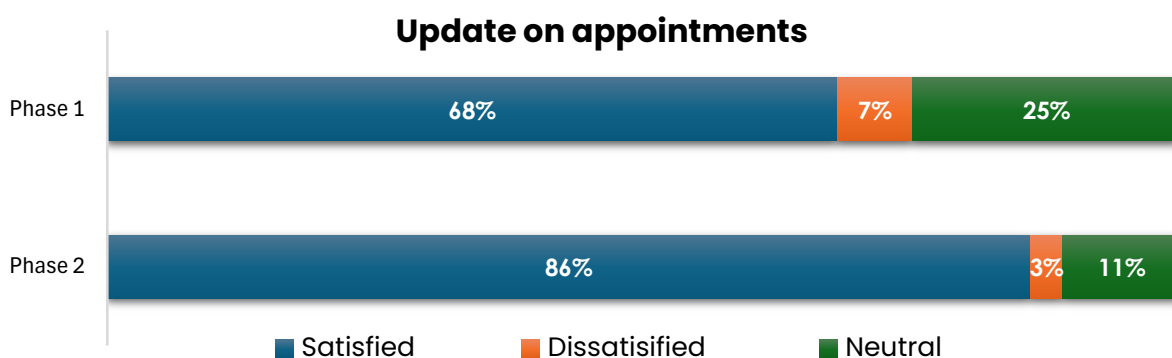
Update on appointments

Phase 1	68%	7%	25%
Phase 2	86%	3%	11%

■ Satisfied ■ Dissatisified ■ Neutral

Fig 7.0 Comparison of 'appointment updates' across the four GP surgeries

Overall appointment experience

Comparing this with phase 1 across the four GP surgeries, we found that (fig 8):
There was a 14% increase in the overall appointment experience rated as 'good'.
Less percentage of people reported a poor appointment experience in Phase 2 (14%)
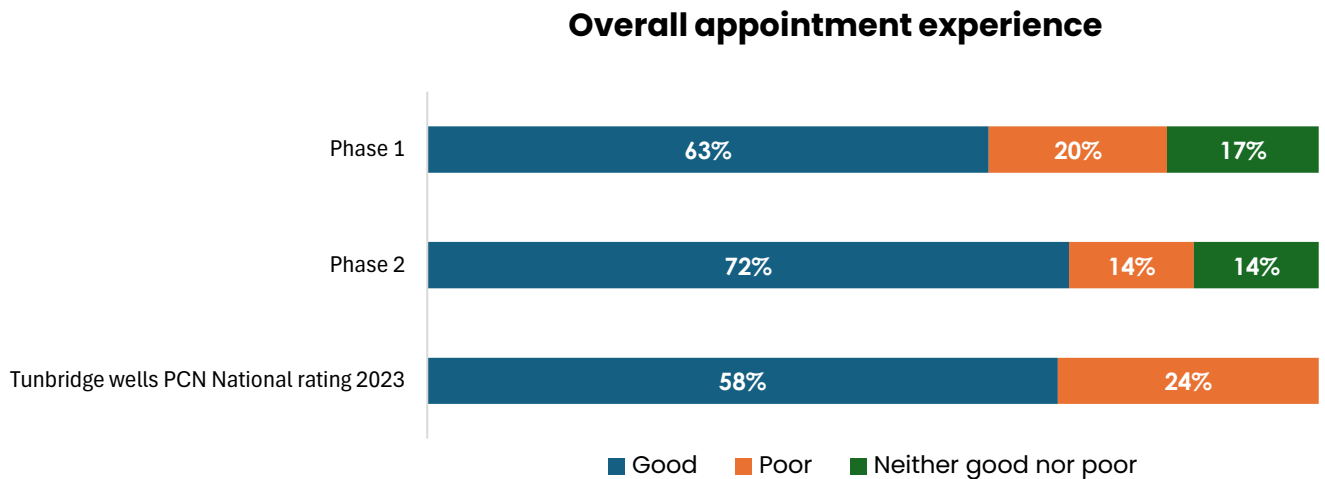than in phase 1 (20%).

Overall appointment experience

	Good	Poor	Neither good nor poor
Phase 1	63%	20%	17%
Phase 2	72%	14%	14%
Tunbridge wells PCN National rating 2023	58%	24%	

Fig 8.0 Comparison of 'overall appointment experience' across the four GP surgeries

According to the National GP Patient Survey 2023 (Jan- Apr), the overall appointment
experience in Tunbridge Wells PCN was reported as 58% 'Good' and 24% 'Poor'.
Comparing our project findings (fig 8) to that of the National GP Patient Survey, Phase
2 result exceeds the National rating for 'Good' and lags for 'Poor'.

Note that the comparison with the National GP Patient Survey is **indicative** and **may
not hold statistical significance** due to sample size variations, number of GP surgeries
involved and other local factors.

Experience using ANIMA to book appointments

Across the four surgeries, out of the 90 people who responded to this question, 47% (42) rated their experience of using ANIMA as 'Good', 33% (30) rated it as 'Poor', and 20% (18) rated it as 'Neither good nor poor'.
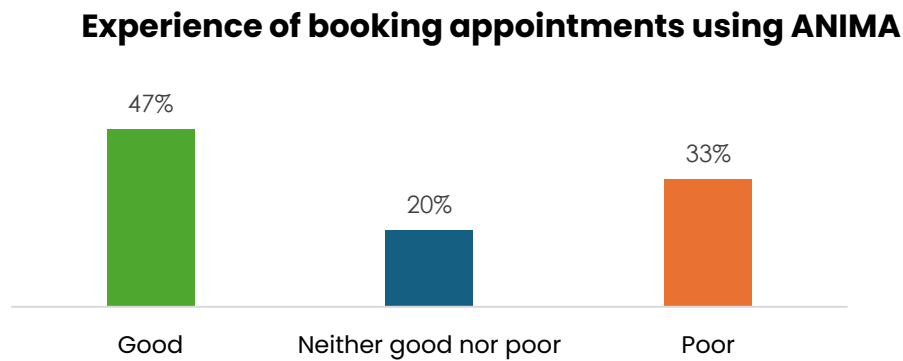
Experience of booking appointments using ANIMA

Fig 9.0 Chart showing people's experience using ANIMA to book appointments across surgeries.

Below are some comments from people who rated their experience as 'good'. Five themes emerge from these.

Timeliness and efficiency (4 mentions)

- *"I received a response between 24-48 hrs of using it"*
- *"For me, it is fairly easy to navigate the system, and I always get a response that day or the next."*

Ease of use and navigation (5 mentions)

- *"Process is quite easy."*
- *"I found the system intuitive."*
- *"It's easy to navigate. No issues."*
- *"Straightforward to use, you type in your password and follow the options."*

Improved appointment scheduling (5 mentions)

- *"I messaged today and got called back quickly - and here I am the same day."*
- *"I was surprised I even got a same day appointment response."*
- *"I have always gotten an appointment convenient for me."*

Reduction in waiting time (3 mentions)

- *"ANIMA has made it easier, you are not hanging on the phone waiting for long, hoping someone picks up your call."*
- *"When my boys were little, I spent hours on the phone trying to get through – call engaged, repeat... until you get through, and all the appointments had gone! ANIMA has made it a lot quicker now."*

Overall Satisfaction (5 mentions)

- *"I think it's good. I think they've cracked it, in my opinion."*
- *"They have done a good job. My partner also had a good experience."*
- *"I would give ANIMA ten out of ten."*

Below are comments from people who rated their experience as 'poor'. Six themes emerged from these.

Complexity and usability issues (6 mentions)

- *"The questions aren't always straightforward, mostly irrelevant to me."*
- *"I find the first page confusing. I do not get to where I want. It's not straightforward and when you finish, I am not sure whether I have actually finished - it doesn't say, so I am left wondering if it has actually been sent or disappeared."*
- *"I cannot navigate it."*
- *"There are so many steps to fill in for the ANIMA form."*
- *"I have been trying to order repeat prescriptions, but I can't work out how to do this on ANIMA - I just can't work out how and I don't know why as I can do this on the NHS app. I can't do anything on ANIMA"*

Technical issues (5 mentions)
- *"It crashes."*
- *"The bloody system doesn't work! It slings you off and back to square one."*
- *"Not sure if it's the website, but you get so far, submit and then get thrown back to the beginning."*

Inaccessibility and digital skills (4 mentions)

- *"When you get to my age, I am over 80, ANIMA is a problem I could do without."*
- *"Because of the questions and how [with a screen reader] I use it, the booking is quite hard overall - I normally click to the next bit or skip. With my screen reader [interviewee was vision impaired], it does not allow you to select some of the options. You need to click in on a scale of 1-5 and that is not."*
- *"I am old as you see, I struggle with the online forms and find it easier to talk to a receptionist instead."*

Repetitive and irrelevant questions (7 mentions)

- *" ANIMA has not been helpful when I am trying to book a conveniently timed appointment. Atrocious! It asks a million and one questions, but never the one you want."*
- *"Too many irrelevant questions."*
- *"I am an IT literate, but it still takes time to complete all the form with some questions seemingly repetitive."*

Appointment scheduling issues (4 mentions)

- *"It doesn't give an option of stating what would be a convenient time for an appointment."*
- *"Unable to book a blood test."*
- *"I am not sure it sorts people as accurately as they need."*
- *"GP asked me to book a blood test but on ANIMA, questions applied only to booking an appointment if you were ill. Not enough options really. I had to ring the surgery, wait on the line - which is too much tossing around."*

Perceived lack of alternatives (3 mentions)

- *"It doesn't give an option of stating what would be a convenient time for an appointment and even if you note what times are inconvenient, it takes no notice, and you get given a time you can't do."*
- *"It is weird that you are pushed onto ANIMA."*
- *"You should not have to use it as that puts you on the back foot from the start. At the moment, I would say ANIMA makes the process, makes life more challenging, especially as opposed to just phoning."*

People's concerns about the usage of ANIMA

We asked people whether they had any concerns regarding the use of ANIMA to access services at their GP practices. Five themes emerged from their responses.

- **Possible faulty triage of Issue** (7 mentions)
  - *"The system questions are tailored towards specific words in the request, but often don't address the issue being raised."*
  - *"You press a button and hope it is doing something at the other end, that someone here [at the GP practice] accesses it and triages you, but no, questions are irrelevant."*
  - *"That it is always going to try to send me to A&E when I know that's not needed; I don't think it's that serious and just need to see a doctor."*
  - *"I am concerned that I might be getting the wrong triage because I find it hard to navigate."*
  - *"Sometimes, the questions are not relevant, but there is a text box at the end where you say the purpose of your enquiry. But it is right at the end of ANIMA - you would give this off the bat over the phone and not have to wade through all the other irrelevant information.... but ANIMA does seem to be able to triage people well. I guess it's a trade-off."*

- **Difficulty to explain problem and convey the urgency** (6 mentions)
  - *"It doesn't provide the convenience of being able to state clearly how urgent or non-urgent the situation is, something you can easily convey on the phone to someone. If you to talk to someone, the urgency is much easier to gauge."*
  - *"You cannot get appointments and online requests as quickly as possible. It is different to when you are talking to people - you can't get across the urgency. You're just stuck."*
  - *"It is making it less interactive because I am finding it hard to fully explain the situation using text boxes."*
  - *"My husband was in constant and terrible pain with sciatica. The app did not prioritise him, even though he was off work and in constant pain, we couldn't seem to communicate that to ANIMA. It goes by the numbers, and I am not sure the app gets it."*

- **Loss of human touch/contact** (9 mentions)
  - *"I just think it shows that the personal touch has been lost - we are not machines. We need to make little explanations about our conditions. We are losing personal contact, and we have a system that cannot meet requirements.*
  - *"I am losing contact with my personal GP. It is becoming another layer of bureaucracy between the GP and the patient and it's concerning."*
  - *"To be honest, I would prefer speaking to someone as you can't properly give feedback to a computer. It's nice to speak to someone."*
  - *"I prefer being able to speak to someone - why are these things taken away from us?"*
  - *"Just the fact that it makes you glued to a screen to explain your issue - I could have done that in few minutes to a person."*

- **Digital confidence** (8 mentions)
  - *"It is a bit difficult to navigate for me as I am a bit old. By nature, it is for the younger age group - they probably have welcomed it with open arms - there is nothing they can't handle!"*
  - *"I don't know really. We've all got to learn to live with modern technology, you can't go back. I just feel it's not very good for older people and it won't get any better for them, they will get left behind and their health will miss out. It's confusing if you can't see a doctor - what do you do? Where are you meant to go? A&E is not the place for everyone and not everyone can drive to get there. ANIMA may have helped the doctors, but I don't think it's helping the patients."*
  - *"It is different and difficult for the old people; I have heard them moan."*
  - *"The older generation, I am concerned for them, but I don't have to worry about me."*
  - *"… it's just too fiddly and awkward for someone of my generation. I am not on any social media, apart from emails."*
  - *"How do I navigate the app myself? So, I'd just phone up rather than worrying myself - let the surgery do what it needs to do. I don't have the mental capacity to learn that new technology. I am not sure I am that confident."*

- **Data security** (2 mentions)
  - *"Concerned about the security of my data. Where does this data go? how is it secured?"*
  - *"Who exactly will this data be saved with?"*

What could be done better to improve ANIMA?

We asked people what they felt could be done to improve the new digital system. Key improvement areas highlighted included enhancing user-friendliness, providing flexible appointment scheduling, improving system navigation and accessibility, integrating a chatbot for specific queries and ongoing conversations, ensuring better communication and updates from doctors, linking with GP websites, making it more accessible for older users and those with disabilities, and simplifying medical terminology.

Enhancing user-friendliness and reducing the use of medical terms (6 mentions)
- *"Make it easier to use and more user friendly."*
- *"Smoother interface."*
- *"Reduce the information we have to put in so that we get to the end quickly."*
- *"It needs to be more patient friendly and less use of medical terms."*
- *"More medical stuff on there to choose from; it is difficult to navigate at first, but I am getting used to it."*

Improving system navigation, communication and accessibility for the elderly users and people with disabilities (6 mentions)
- *"The developer should consider making it accessible for people with disabilities like myself. I always use a screen reader. Provide screen reader options for vision impaired people."*
- *"Find a way to help us the elderly navigate using it."*
- *"More training for the elderly to get more confident."*
- *"The Lonsdale GP website should be linked to the ANIMA app such that 'book appointments' menu can point you to other methods."*
- *"Only thing is I had to try and find online the details of what the portal was called. It would be easy if I had thought to look on the GP's website and signpost from there - I ended up trawling through emails and eventually found it. Maybe a monthly update from the doctor would be useful, so everyone is aware!"*

Flexible appointment scheduling (3 mentions)

- *"Drop down menu options for appointment times - they offer you something, but we have to go out of school hours as schools are really clamping down on school absences. We went on ANIMA, were given a school-timed appointment, but couldn't change it via ANIMA - had to phone up...and wait 59 minutes in the process."*
- *"Be able to book boosters via ANIMA."*

Integration of chatbot and communication features (5 mentions)

- *"There is not in the system at the moment the option of being able to ask ANIMA certain specific questions. Maybe there could be a chatbot function."*
- *"There could be a reply back button, so you can have a conversation. It's not 24/7 where you can send a message through. Maybe have a chatbot for the restricted times."*
- *"...maybe provide a voice note option to complement explaining the patient situation."*

Overall experience of GP surgeries

89% of people we spoke to, reported having an overall good experience of their GP surgeries. 2% expressed dissatisfaction with the overall experience, while 9% remained neutral, categorising their experience as neither good nor poor.

Comparing this with phase 1 across the four GP surgeries, we found that (fig 10):
A high percentage of people reported good experience in both phases, with a 16% increase in Phase 2.
Poor experience rating reduced from 14% in phase 1 to 2% in the phase 2.
The experience of people rated as neither good nor poor remained the same.
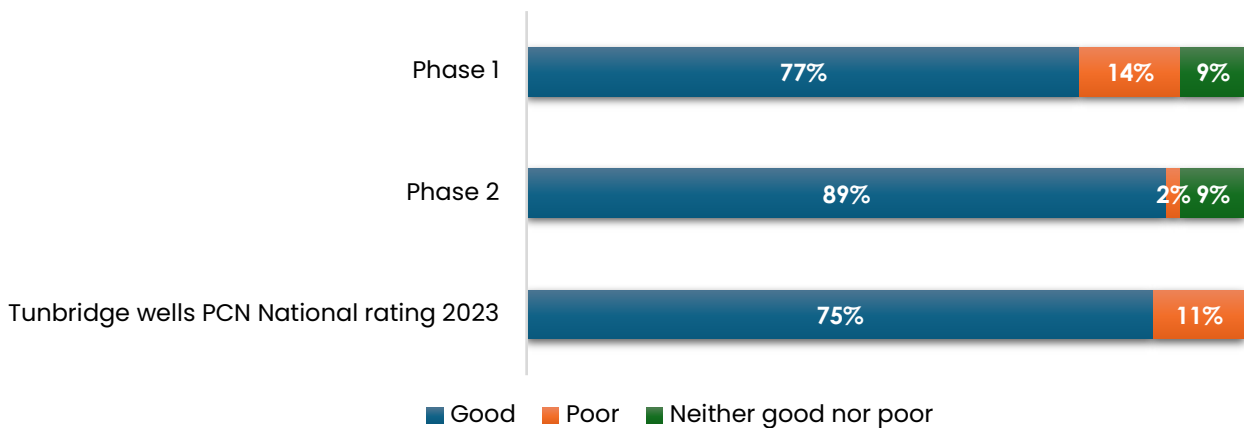
People's overall experience of GP surgeries

	Good	Poor	Neither good nor poor
Phase 1	77%	14%	9%
Phase 2	89%	2%	9%
Tunbridge wells PCN National rating 2023	75%	11%	

■ Good ■ Poor ■ Neither good nor poor

Fig 10. Comparison of 'overall experience rating 'across the four GP surgeries

According to the National GP Patient Survey 2023 (Jan- Apr), the overall experience of GP surgeries in Tunbridge Wells PCN was reported as 75% 'Good' and 11% 'Poor'.
Comparing our project findings (fig 10) to that of the National GP Patient Survey, Phase 2 result exceeds the National rating for 'Good' and lags for 'Poor'.
Note that the comparison with the National GP Patient Survey **is indicative** and **may not hold statistical significance** due to sample size variations, number of GP surgeries involved and other local factors.

Staff Engagement

Who did we speak to?

We spoke to 27 (100%) staff across the four GP surgeries, most 15 (56%) of which were medical secretaries, administrators or receptionists (fig 11).

Staff engaged

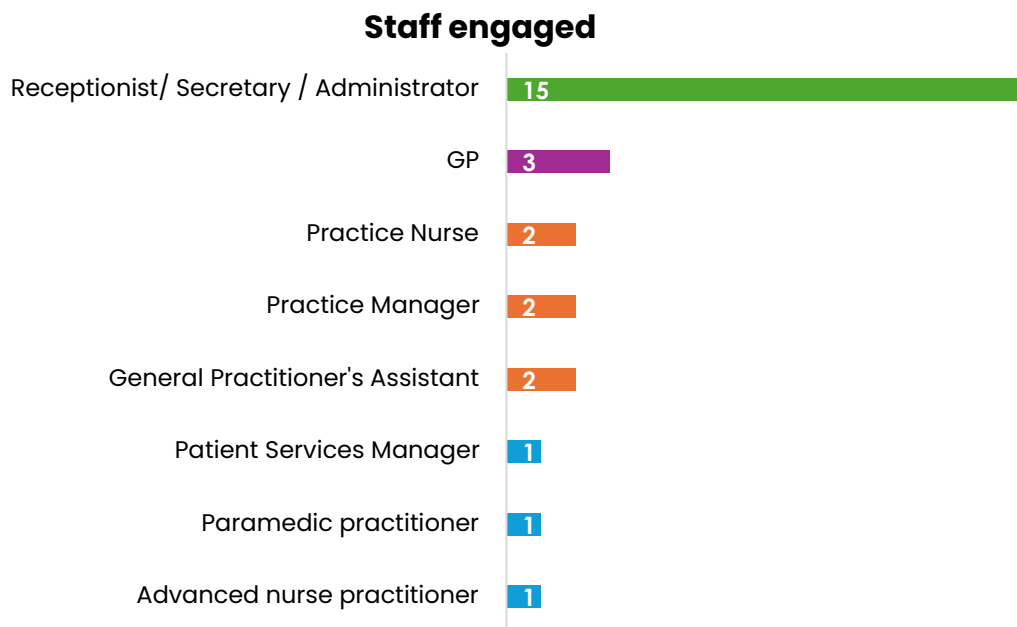| Role	Count
Receptionist/ Secretary / Administrator	15
GP	3
Practice Nurse	2
Practice Manager	2
General Practitioner's Assistant	2
Patient Services Manager	1
Paramedic practitioner	1
Advanced nurse practitioner	1

Fig 11. The distribution of staff that we engaged with.

Do you feel confident in being able to use ANIMA to fulfil the needs of your current role?

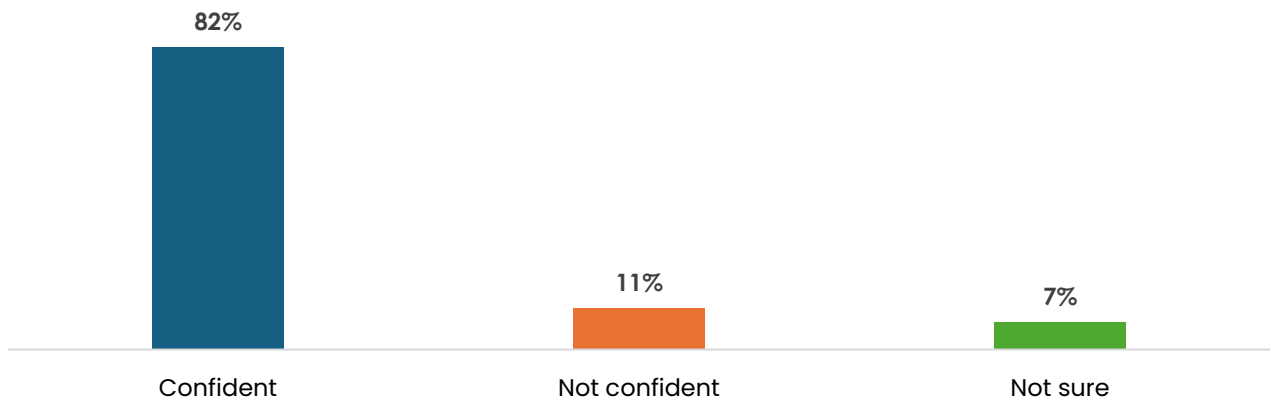## Staff's confidence using ANIMA to fulfil needs of role

Fig 12. Staff's confidence in using ANIMA to fulfil role.

22 (82%) of the staff told us they were confident in using ANIMA to fulfil the needs of their current role. 3 (11%) staff felt they were not confident while 2 (7%) staff were unsure.

Has the implementation of ANIMA had any impact on your workload?

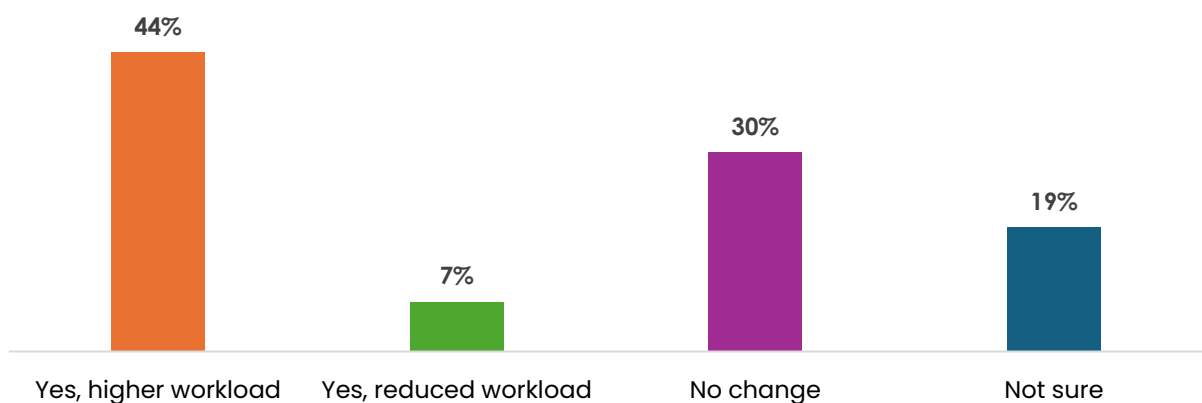## ANIMA's impact on staff workload

Fig 13. Impact of ANIMA on staff workload.

12 (44%) staff felt the use of ANIMA increased their workload
2 (7%) staff felt the use of ANIMA reduced their workload.
8 (30%) staff felt there was no change to their workload.
5 (19%) staff were unsure whether ANIMA's usage brought changes to their workload.

Have you noticed any impact on your personal wellbeing or stress levels since ANIMA was introduced in your practice?

Perceived impact of ANIMA on personal wellbeing or stress levels

Fig 14. Perceived impact on personal wellbeing/ stress levels.
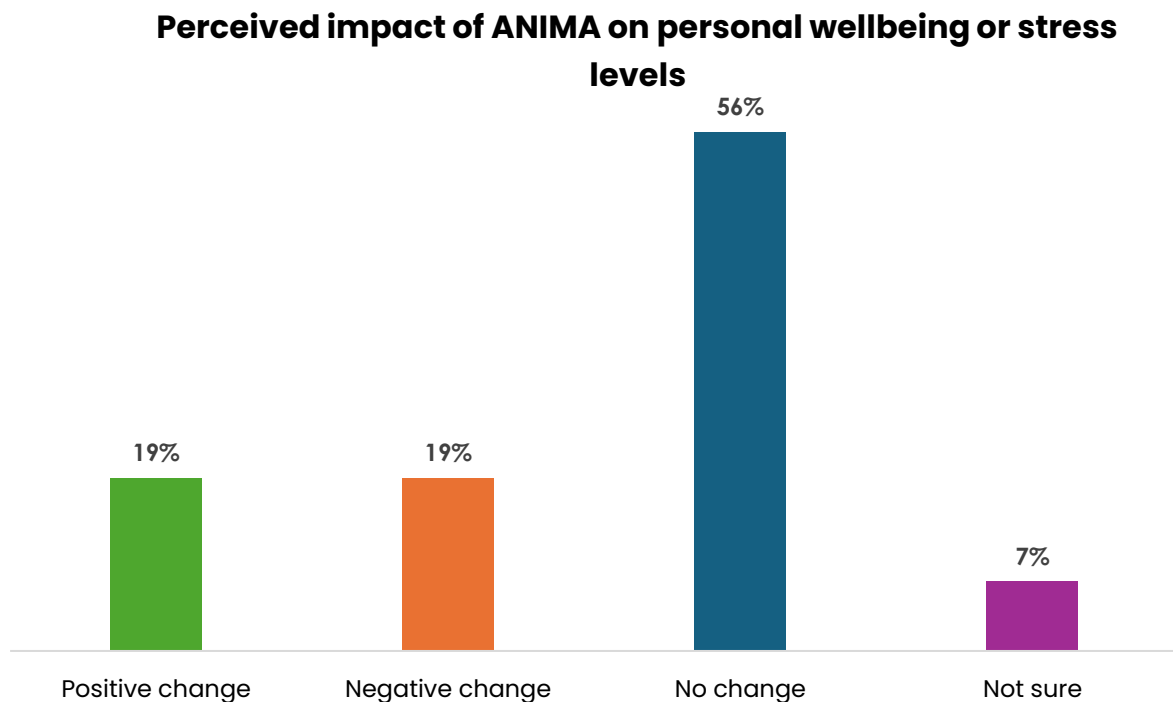
- 5 (19%) staff felt the introduction of ANIMA has increased their stress levels/personal wellbeing
- 5 (19%) staff felt the introduction of ANIMA has decreased their stress levels/personal wellbeing
- 15 (56%) staff felt the introduction of ANIMA has made no change to their stress levels/personal wellbeing.
- 2 (7%) staff were unsure if there was an impact or not.

Have you noticed a reduction in the number of telephone calls that your practice is receiving?

Any reduction in the number of telephone calls received?
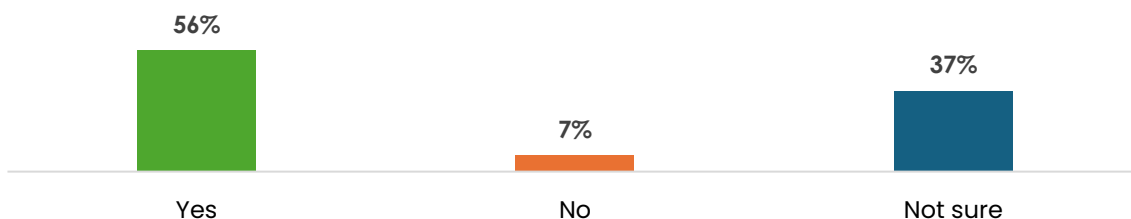
Fig 15. Impact of ANIMA on workload.

- 15 (56%) staff felt the number of phone calls the GP surgeries receive has reduced.
- 2 (7%) staff felt the number of phone calls the GP surgeries receive has not reduced
- 10 (37%) staff were unsure whether there was a change to the number of phone calls the GP surgeries receive.

What has the introduction of ANIMA resulted into in your practice?

ANIMA's impact on patients' contact
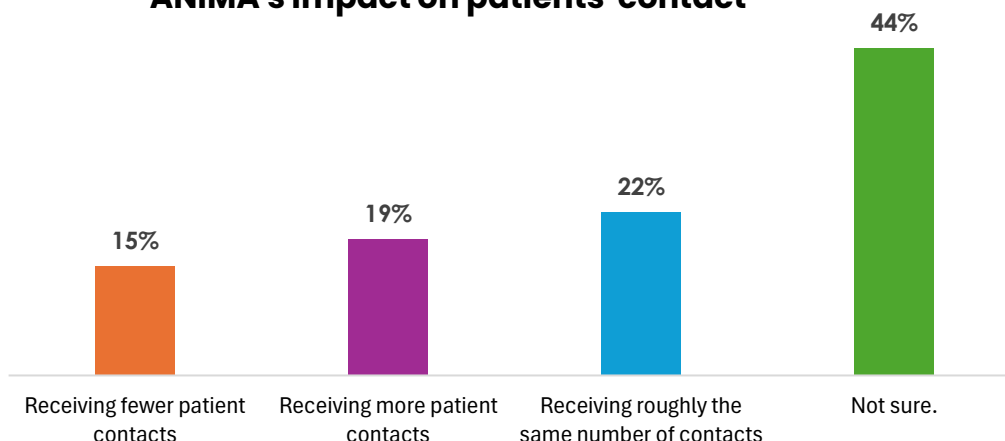
Fig 16. ANIMA's impact on patient contacts.

- 4 (15%) staff felt that they now receive fewer patient contacts.
- 5 (19%) staff felt that they now receive more patient contacts.
- 6 (22%) felt that they continue to receive roughly the same number of patient contacts
- 12 (44%) staff were unsure.

Thematic report on staff's feedback regarding use of ANIMA in GP Surgeries

Accuracy and reliability of system (2 mentions)

- *"What we receive as clinicians is often useless as patients have clicked any box just to get through the system as their particular problem is not catered for. What we received on the clinical system is too long. Lots of No's and few of Yes. When I speak to the patient, I often find it is inaccurate because they have clicked irrelevant buttons to get through it. I have therefore resorted to just looking at what the overall issue is, cough, etc., and then asking, 'how can I help you?' when they come in. The history on the system is generally so inaccurate that it can't be relied on, so it doesn't save time."*

Impact on workload and appointment (12 mentions)

- *"Although the phone calls have reduced, the length of calls have extended."*
- *"It has helped us get more patient details e.g. emails and phone numbers and also reduced the number of phone calls. But it has added to the workload."*
- *"Any new system increases workload initially and ANIMA has done that. It is now settling down. It seems to have reduced our appointment waiting time from 4 weeks to two and a half which is better but still outside what we want."*
- *"We get fewer calls, but they seem to be of greater length, having to help people with setting up accounts and submitting requests."*
- *"I would say that the actual workload and number of patient contacts is unchanged, it's just coming in a different way. While this allows us to manage the workload differently (i.e. not all at 8am but spread more evenly over the day), ultimately it has not reduced the workload in any way. It is good to have [ANIMA] as an option for patients and I understand the reasoning of course, but it has not had the impact on increasing appointment availability that we had hoped."*
- *"We still have patients call up and we have to redirect them to complete a request themselves, often calling again because something has gone wrong. Not being able to add more on after 5 pm, telling patients to try again in the morning, puts more work on for morning team especially as patients are likely to call up if they think it is urgent. Patients unhappy about being told to call 111 after 5 pm if it is an emergency, even though we are still open for another hour and half, especially when they are unsure what they will be able to do to help or feel GP can help. Ultimately, I feel I cannot be efficient. We still have high volumes of calls so do not have time to look at Anima requests that have come back to us from GP, until 5 pm onwards."*

Benefits (5 mentions)

- *"I feel happier when covering the phone lines as I don't have to make the decision as to whether the patient needs an appointment. The doctor now has this decision, and I feel this is better."*
- *"I believe this system is helpful for GPs and triaging system but not so much for reception staff. The elderly struggle and we often end up doing it for them.*
- *"I think it works really well from an inside perspective, we have had feedback that patients enjoy using it, and those that struggle we allow to call reception for them to fill it out."*

System and feature feedback (5 mentions)

- – "There are far too many questions……"
- – "The ANIMA summary that is generated for the notes is pretty awful, the AI interpretation is better but lacks important details - the developer could work on this I feel."
- – "There seems to be a lot more functionality than our practice is currently using, but implementing all at once may have caused more problems than it solved."

Patient experience and access (7 mentions)

- *"Some individuals have grasped the new way of accessing primary care whereas there has also been a lot of push back. This is to be expected and I do feel now that things are settling, and we have passed the most challenging time with the launch."*

- *" Getting grumbles from many patients not able to do an ANIMA due to no internet (or so they tell us) or they have registered and forgotten their password and we have to explain or talk them through how to reset it. There are positives and negatives of ANIMA. The majority of the older patients do not like it. Personally, I feel some patients will just not bother to contact the GP. I honestly feel the patient should be given the choice as to whether they wish to use an online care navigation system and not have it forced upon them."*

- *"With regards to patient access, it depends how IT literate the patient is. We still allow the option of phoning in and will go through ANIMA requests over the phone. I assisted with a drop-in session for people who were having trouble using ANIMA and many went away frustrated and confused (these were mostly elderly patients who only use their phones for text messages or calls). One positive I can see is that it has motivated us to think differently about how we use our appointments, thus reducing the waiting times between request and being seen. We have also had some positive feedback from patients who are not good with technology and find it a quick and simple way to get what they want."*

- *"ANIMA is useful for patients that can go online, not for patients who are not able to go online. Also, I feel that the traffic light system needs to be monitored as often - it needs to be upgraded. Reviewing all seems to take more time."*

- *"Majority of patients appear happy with ANIMA, I find the elderly patients are the most concerned."*

Suggested improvements by staff on ANIMA

Inclusivity for increased access.

- *"I am however concerned about people who do not use mobile phones or laptops being excluded and opting out by being frightened of using it. Who is checking on them, to see if they are satisfied - I aim to see how these groups will be catered for through this new development."*
- *"I feel that some of our older patients are experiencing a bad time with ANIMA, we need to be patient and reassuring."*

System usability and reliability

- *"If the crashes of the system could be fixed. There's been lots of crashes. Lots of clicking to sign off also."*
- *"On the occasions that I have used ANIMA on reception, I find the number of pages you have to go through frustrating - particularly when you are closing off a request. It also creates a lot of text which is saved to EMIS [Egton Medical Information systems]."*

Training and collaboration

- *"Although it is good to have options of how ANIMA can be used, I do not think that original training allowed each surgery to work more closely together when dealing with challenges faced. We were all using ANIMA differently so didn't really have an opportunity to help each other over the early hurdles."*

Feature enhancement

- *"A request option for patients to send in documents e.g. clinic letters and discharge summaries. At the moment, they can only send in photos if they choose a skin condition request, this has been an issue for patients trying to send in documents."*
- *"Eventually if patients will be able to pick their own appointment day/times, I think this will help too."*
- *"The ability to add patient on for the next day - non-urgent or admin requests."*
- *"If a patient currently orders medication via ANIMA, they have to free type the name of the medication unlike the existing NHS app or Patient Access app. Also, it doesn't tell them when their medication is due, nor does it allow them to track their prescription. Ordering meds through an app is much easier and quicker for the patient and faster to process by the surgery."*
- *"Not too easy to have different patients open in EMIS and ANIMA - hopefully in the future the two will sync a bit better."*

Workload management

- *"I think review needs to be made on how many ANIMA [requests] can be sent per day. Although I understand this is a practice issue."*

Conclusion

The Digital Front Door initiative, implemented through the ANIMA system, aimed to streamline patient demand management and improve access to GP services across four participating surgeries. The results indicate varying degrees of success, highlighting both positive outcomes and areas for further improvement.

The shift from phone calls to online booking via ANIMA suggests a growing acceptance of the digital system among participants, although some concerns about the system remain. The implementation of ANIMA has significantly improved appointment accessibility, with fewer people now waiting a week or more to secure an appointment and a noticeable increase in next-day and same-day appointments. However, the fact that patients still experience delays highlights the need for further improvements in managing demand and appointment allocation.

More patients reported a positive appointment experience since the introduction of ANIMA. Approximately half of the users had a good experience with booking appointments via the system, though the other half had less favourable experiences, indicating the need for ongoing enhancements. Overall satisfaction with GP services remains high, with many patients recognising the helpfulness of their surgeries.

Key patient concerns included faulty triage processes, difficulty explaining medical issues digitally, loss of personal contact, additional tasks required to access services, digital confidence issues among the elderly, and data security concerns. These issues highlight the necessity for a user-friendly design and robust support mechanisms.

Most staff felt confident using ANIMA, though few reported a reduction in workload. The system did not significantly affect stress levels or well-being but did reduce the number of phone calls received. Staff noted benefits such as improved patient detail collection and appointment management. However, concerns about system accuracy, increased workload due to duplicated tasks, and challenges faced by less patients who are not good with technology were prevalent.

Both patients and staff emphasised the need for the system to be more user-friendly, especially for elderly patients and those with disabilities. Addressing technical issues like system crashes and improving synchronisation with existing software were highlighted as crucial. Additional features, such as better appointment scheduling, improved navigation, more intuitive medication ordering processes, and the ability to send documents, were also suggested.

In summary, the ANIMA system has brought several advantages to the participating GP surgeries, such as improved appointment accessibility, better management of patient details etc. However, addressing the concerns and challenges identified is crucial for realising the full potential of this digital solution. Continuous feedback and iterative enhancements will be essential to cater to all user demographics effectively and to enhance the overall healthcare experience.

While this initiative intends to improve the current landscape of patient accessibility, its unintended impact such as widening the gap of health inequalities must be taken into consideration. The insights gained from this evaluation provide a valuable roadmap for future developments in primary care, ensuring that digital health solutions can meet the evolving needs of both patients and staff.

Limitations

The sample size, while sufficient for initial insights, may not be representative of the broader population. The selection of only four GP surgeries might have introduced selection bias, as these surgeries could have unique characteristics not reflective of other practices.

Our engagements in the second phase were conducted exclusively with individuals who have either used ANIMA or had some form of interaction with it. Consequently, the experiences of those who have not yet used ANIMA to access GP surgeries may not be fully represented.

Although 27 staff members from four GP surgeries were engaged with, with more than half being medical secretaries, administrators, or receptionists. This may limit the generalisability of our findings to other staff roles within GP surgeries.

The data collection relied on self-reported information from both patients and staff, which can be subject to response bias. Participants might have given socially desirable answers or those influenced by their most recent experiences rather than an average perspective.

The evaluation was conducted shortly after the implementation of ANIMA. This short timeframe might not have been enough for users to fully adapt to the new system, potentially influencing their responses and the perceived effectiveness of the system.

The project was confined to the Tunbridge Wells Primary Care Network, which limits the generalisability of the findings to other regions with different demographic and healthcare dynamics.

Recommendations

1. **Enhance user training and support.**
   - Specific: Host training sessions for patients through patient participation groups (PPGs) to improve digital confidence and system usability.
   - Measurable: Track the number of training sessions conducted and participant feedback to assess the effectiveness of the training.
   - Achievable: Utilise existing resources and partnerships with patient participation groups to facilitate training.
   - Relevant: This may likely address the user concerns about difficulty navigating the system.
   - Time-bound: Initiate within the next three months

   Outcome:

   The recommendation was unanimously agreed upon. Stakeholders recognised the need for targeted training, particularly through Patient Participation Groups (PPGs), to enhance users' digital confidence and ensure they can effectively navigate the ANIMA system. They committed to launching these training sessions within the next three months, utilising existing resources and partnerships for maximum impact.

   Stakeholders acknowledged that by engaging PPGs directly, they hope to build a more robust foundation of user competence, which is expected to lead to higher patient satisfaction, fewer support requests and lesser time on phone calls by frontline staff.

2. **Streamline user interface to improve its use.**
   - Specific: Streamline the user interface, reducing the number of steps required to complete tasks.
   - Measurable: Monitor system performance metrics and user satisfaction before and after the improvements.
   - Achievable: Allocate resources to technical development and prioritise critical issues.
   - Relevant: This directly addresses frequent system crashes and complicated navigation reported by users.
   - Time-bound: Implement changes within three months and review system performance as when possible.

Outcome:

The recommendation to streamline the user interface was agreed upon. Stakeholders agreed that the current staff interface is a little bit clunky, particularly in areas such as patient sign-off. They have notified the ANIMA provider about these concerns and expect improvements to be made promptly with a resolution within the next three months.

3. Improve the integration with the existing systems.

- Specific: Enhance the synchronisation between ANIMA and existing GP software like EMIS to prevent duplicated tasks and improve workflow.
- Measurable: Track the time spent on administrative tasks and the frequency of duplicated efforts.
- Achievable: Collaborate with IT specialists and software vendors to facilitate integration.
- Relevant: Addresses staff concerns about increased workload and inefficiency.
- Time-bound: Complete integration improvements within three months.

Outcome:

The recommendation for better integration between ANIMA and existing GP software, such as EMIS, was agreed. Stakeholders reported that discussions are already underway to enhance synchronisation with existing tools, which is expected to reduce duplicated tasks and improve workflow efficiency particularly for staff, with a possible timeline of the next three months.

4. Investigate screen reader feature.

- Specific: Investigate screen reader feature option within the ANIMA system for people with accessibility needs.
- Measurable: Monitor usage rates of the new feature and user satisfaction.
- Achievable: Incrementally roll out feature across patient groups in GP surgeries.
- Relevant: Enhances the system's utility and user satisfaction.

Outcome:

The proposal to investigate the screen reader feature was agreed upon. Stakeholders will consult with the ANIMA provider to determine whether the current issues are related to user devices or if there is a need for the system enhancement.

5. Co-production with specific groups.
- Specific: Create a working group consisting of individuals with digital skills who face barriers in accessing health services, such as those who use screen readers, people with hearing issues etc, to test and review the features of the application.
- Measurable: Track the number of participants in the working group, the frequency of feedback received, and improvements made based on their input.
- Achievable: Recruit participants through partnerships with relevant organisations and online platforms, ensuring a diverse and representative group.
- Relevant: Improves the accessibility and usability of the ANIMA system, directly addressing the needs of users who face digital barriers.
- Time-bound: Discuss the establishment of the working group within the next six months and monitor feedback sessions.

Outcome:

The recommendation to establish a co-production working group was agreed. Stakeholders agreed to explore the creation of a diverse group, including individuals with digital barriers, to test and review ANIMA's features. This initiative will be discussed with the Digital and Data group within the next six months to ensure it aligns with future digital advancements.

Stakeholders agreed that involving users with specific needs in the development process will enhance the creation of a more accessible and user-friendly system, addressing the diverse needs of all patients and ensuring that future digital solutions remain inclusive.

Other feedback:

1. We also heard feedback about some crashes when using the ANIMA app during our patient engagement.

Comment: Stakeholders mentioned that despite previous assurances from the ANIMA provider that no backend issues were detected, they (stakeholders) were committed to a renewed investigation with the ANIMA provider within the next three months, emphasising the need for a stable and efficient interface to reduce user frustration and improve overall system performance.

2. We also heard feedback about the need for features such as document submission, flexible appointment scheduling and medication prescriptions in ANIMA.

Comment: Stakeholders clarified NHS policies concerning digital front doors, emphasising that certain functionalities, such as medication orders, repeat prescription or tracking, are restricted to the NHS App for patient safety reasons. They also explained that while users can upload photos into ANIMA, documents need to be referenced in requests, after which a link will be provided to the user for uploading after review. In terms of appointment scheduling, stakeholders mentioned that text message synchronisation with ANIMA is available, allowing users to make advanced appointment requests more efficiently.

Appendix

Survey questionnaire (Public)

ANIMA - THE WEST KENT DIGITAL FRONT DOOR PROJECT

Healthwatch Kent is working with the West Kent Health & Care Partnership to listen to feedback about the general experience of accessing your GP practice.

The NHS is piloting a new digital system called ANIMA across Tunbridge Wells which should help people get access to the right place for the care they need. We are talking to people to understand what the situation is like now since the new system has been put in place. This is to see if the new digital system has made a difference to people trying to access care through their GP or if more work still needs to be done.

We want to make sure your story drives positive change for everyone. To do that we need your permission. Are you happy for us to:

- Record your story and share anonymously with decision makers so they can hear your voice.
- Share your story with our sister organisations who are also working to improve services in Kent & Medway.

I agree. * Yes [ ] No [ ]

SELECT YOUR GP PRACTICE:

    a. Lonsdale medical centre
    b. Kingswood surgery
    c. St Andrews medical centre
    d. Speldhurst & Greggswood Medical Group

ACCESSING YOUR GP PRACTICE

1. How do you contact your GP practice for health-related issues in the last 2-3months?
    a. Walk-in
    b. Phone call.
    c. Online booking (e.g. through ANIMA)
    d. Others (please specify): _____

2. Which of these online services have you used when trying to contact your GP practice in the last 2-3 months?

    You can select more than one.

    a. Filling an online form e.g. ANIMA
    b. Booking appointments online
    c. Ordering repeat prescriptions online
    d. Accessing my medical records
    e. Others (please specify): _____

1

EASE OF ACCESS

3. How convenient has it been for you to get through to your GP practice in the last 2-3 months by:

    Phone call:

    a. very easy,
    b. easy,
    c. not very easy,
    d. not at all easy,
    e. haven't tried yet

    Any reason for your answer?

    Walk-in:

    a. very easy,
    b. easy,
    c. not very easy,
    d. not at all easy,
    e. haven't tried yet

    Any reason for your answer?

    Online booking e.g. through ANIMA:

    a. very easy,
    b. easy,
    c. not very easy,
    d. not at all easy,
    e. haven't tried yet

    Any reason for your answer?

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PROBLEMS ACCESSING GP PRACTICE

4. When did you last try to book in an appointment with a GP/nurse/healthcare professional at your GP practice?
   a. Within the last 3 months
   b. 3-6 months ago,
   c. 6-12 months ago,
   d. over a year
   e. don't know.

5. What is your overall experience making an appointment with a GP/nurse/healthcare professional since the GP practice started using ANIMA?

   a. Very good
   b. Fairly good
   c. Neither good nor poor
   d. Fairly poor
   e. Very poor

6. Please tell us about your experience in the question above.

7. How long do you have to wait to get a booked appointment with a GP/nurse/healthcare professional since the GP practice started using ANIMA?
   a. Same day
   b. The next day
   c. Few days later
   d. A week or more later
   e. Can't remember.

8. How was your experience using ANIMA to book appointments for yourself or loved ones?
   a. Very good
   b. Fairly good
   c. Neither good nor poor
   d. Fairly poor

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   e. Very poor

9. Can you tell us why you gave that answer?

10. What are you concerned about most using ANIMA to get access to the services that you need in the GP practice?

11. Please tell us what could be done better to improve ANIMA for use.

12. Were your appointment needs met during your time with a GP/nurse/healthcare professional at your GP practice?
    a. Yes, definitely!
    b. Yes, to some extent.
    c. No, not at all.
    d. Don't know / can't say.

13. How would you rate the way your GP practice provides updates on your appointment now?
    a. Very satisfied
    b. Satisfied
    c. Neutral
    d. Dissatisfied
    e. Very dissatisfied

14. Do you feel you were directed to the right person or unit for your appointment since the GP practice started using ANIMA?

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a. Yes
b. No

15. If no, please describe your experience.

16. Generally, how would you describe your overall experience of your GP practice now?
    a. Very good
    b. Fairly good
    c. Neither good nor poor
    d. Fairly poor
    e. Very poor

17. Please can you tell us why you provided the answer above?

18. During your most recent appointment in the last 2-3 months, have you at one point been directed to a neighbouring GP practice for your appointment?
    a. Yes
    b. No

19. If you selected YES above, could you tell us why you were directed to another GP practice?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is greatly appreciated and will help us improve access to healthcare services.

5

Survey questionnaire (Staff)

ANIMA - THE WEST KENT DIGITAL FRONT DOOR PROJECT

Healthwatch Kent is working with the West Kent Health & Care Partnership to listen to feedback about the general experience of accessing your GP practice.

The NHS is piloting a new digital system called ANIMA across Tunbridge Wells which should help people get access to the right place for the care they need. We want to hear from staff how ANIMA has impacted the way they work. This is to find out what worked well and potential areas of improvement that may then shape the design of the digital system further.

We want to make sure your story drives positive change for everyone. To do that we need your permission. Are you happy for us to:

- Record your story and share anonymously with decision makers so they can hear your voice.
- Share your story with our sister organisations who are also working to improve services in Kent & Medway.

I agree. ● Yes [   ] No [   ]

SELECT YOUR GP PRACTICE:

    a. Lonsdale medical centre
    b. Kingswood surgery
    c. St Andrews medical centre
    d. Speldhurst & Greggswood Medical Group

Indicate your Job Title:

Do you feel confident in being able to use Anima to fulfil the needs of your current role?

    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Not sure

Has the implementation of Anima had any impact on your workload?

    a. Yes, higher workload
    b. Yes, reduced workload
    c. No change
    d. Not sure

Have you noticed any impact on your personal wellbeing or stress levels since Anima was introduced in your practice?

    a. Positive change

    b. Negative change
    c. No change
    d. Not sure

Have you noticed a reduction in the number of telephone calls that your practice is receiving?

    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Not sure

Which of these has the introduction of Anima resulted into in your practice:

    a. Receiving more patient contacts
    b. Receiving fewer patient contacts
    c. Receiving roughly the same number of contacts
    d. Not sure.

Do you think that implementing Anima within your Practice has had a positive or negative impact on patients being able to access the help/support that they need:

    a. Positive
    b. Negative
    c. No change
    d. Unsure

Do you have any feedback that you would like to share regarding the use of Anima in your practice?

Are there any improvements or changes that you would like to see?

healthwatch
Kent