



## Students access school nurses through smartphone apps

Julie Penfold investigates the reactions of young people and professionals to an innovative communication service

A SMARTPHONE app that enables young people to contact their school nurses by text message is being piloted across three school sites in Leicestershire.

The communications app was devised by Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) after students attending a series of drop-in focus groups at the schools said they wanted better access to their school nurses.

The app, part of a proposed new communications system in the county's schools, was launched at the start of the school summer term among:

- 1,200 students aged between 11 and 16 at Judgemeadow Community College, Leicester.
- 2,000 students aged between 14 and 19 at Lutterworth College, Lutterworth.

- 1,300 students aged between 11 and 19 at Charnwood College, Loughborough.

Mobile media development manager at LPT Jimmy Endicott says: 'We developed the app for school nurse communications in response to feedback we received from young people's focus groups. Young people want more convenient and timely ways to contact their school nurse.'

'In the first instance, we wanted to ensure that we provide a robust and safe way for young people to text their school nurse, and smartphones are a communication method that is already out there and accessible to everyone.'

'Our goal, which we hope to achieve shortly, is to implement an app that can be used on all mobile devices.'

A second version of the app will allow young people with smartphones, tablets or computers to log in to a secure site and use instant messaging software to communicate with school nurses. Each person using the site will have a user name and must know the relevant password.

The app was launched in light of the Department of Health's school nurse development programme, which showed that young people prefer to use current methods of communication with school nurses.

Researchers found that young people value the accessibility and immediacy of communication in short messages and through online interfaces.

### Appointments

The national future vision for school nursing recommends that all school nursing teams should ensure that service users can request appointments by text. It also encourages school nurses to consider how apps can enable young people to become more involved in their own care.

Forty members of clinical staff across the three Leicestershire schools have been trained to test the communications system and can access messages on any day between Monday and Friday.

School nurse at Charnwood College Caroline Palmer says: 'Our nursing team has a rota to check the system throughout the day and each school nurse also receives email notification when a text comes through.'

'It is a really quick and easy service to use. We can manage our time efficiently and the rota system helps other members of the team become confident in using the service.'

Each school nurse team has its own text number for young people to use when they want to have confidential conversation. Senders may include their identities in their texts or send them anonymously.

If young people send texts during daytime hours, they receive automated messages to let them know a school nurse will respond within a specific period of time.