



ENABLING QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN PRACTICE



# EQUIP LUNCH AND LEARN SESSION

## SMS Optimisation

# AIM FOR THE DAY

## CONTEXT: ICB-Level

- **Central Budget Cut** since Oct 2024, it have impacted the main communication tool used by practices, putting the achievement of national targets at risk
- **High Messaging Usage:** Top practice users identified; may signal pressure or inefficiencies.
- **Unclear FY 2025/26 Direction:** No system-level guidance, complicating future planning.

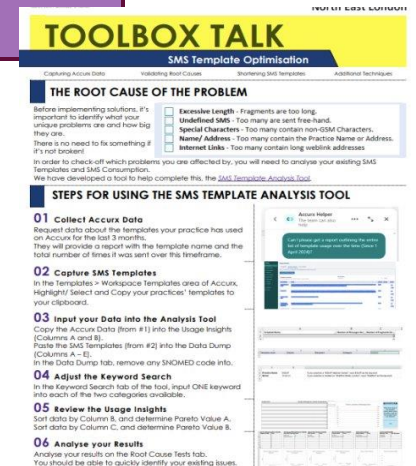
## CONTEXT: Practice-Level

- **Awareness Gap:** Some staff are unaware of available fragment rules and templates.
- **Dashboard Access:** Limited visibility of the **Accurx dashboard** among the practice staff.
- **Cost Transparency:** Insufficient cost breakdown, no timely invoice, hindering informed decision-making.

In December 2024, EQUIP were asked to support the SMS high-usage practices in optimising their fragments and generating cost savings. Ten practices engaged, two of them joined.

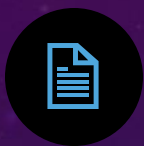
## Focus for the day

- Key strategies and tips to help streamline text messaging comms and improve financial efficiency
- TOOLBOX: Tools and practical steps for your practices to make savings and improve patient communications.
- Two practice testimonials

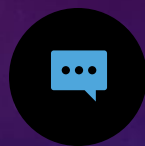


# EQUIP INTERVENTION

EQUIP developed a one pager SMS toolbox that, applied on a limited number of templates, enabled the practice team to make the changes below. EQUIP and Accrx co-created the Fragment Tool Analysis and SMS Flowchart to get clarity on your problem and steps toward your solution



Review and streamline existing templates—cut unnecessary content (manual and AI testing).



Raise awareness: free text is your biggest risk.



Team alignment: Make sure everyone is on board and aware of the changes (workshop).



Copy writing: Use simpler language and ensure clarity by using the readability score.



Coproduction: Involve patients in co-designing the final template.



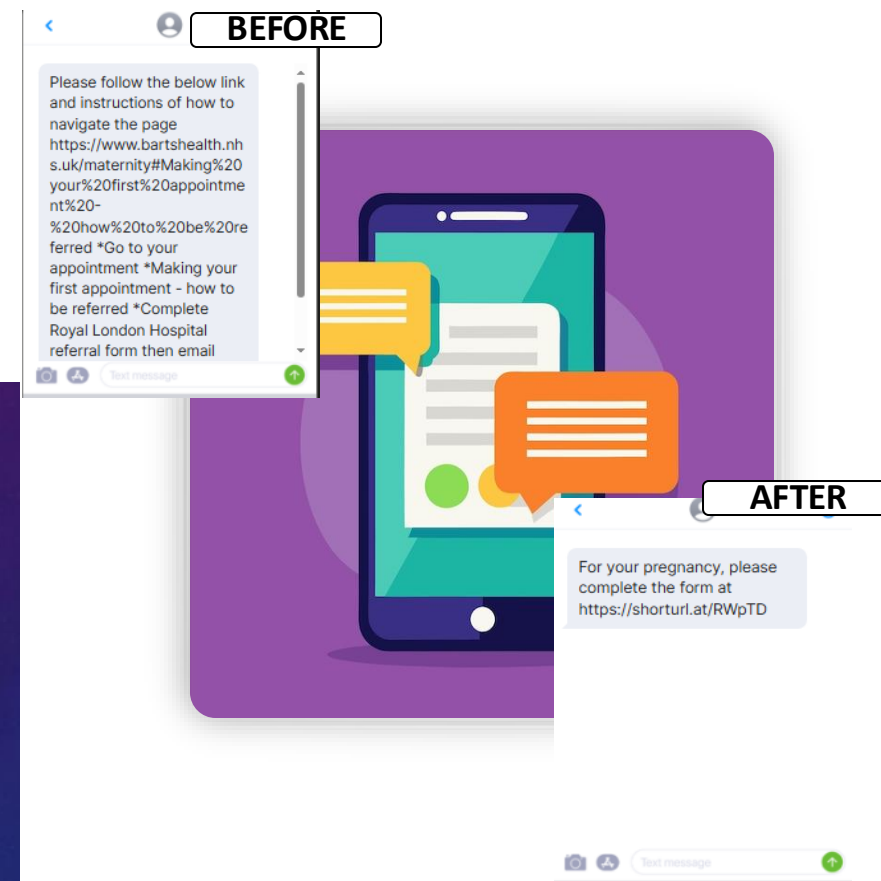
Remove special characters: they eat your characters allowance and tap into your wallet!



Tech intervention: Shorten URL and verify links.



Phased changes: Target one pathway at the time.



## FINANCIAL IMPACT FOR PRACTICE, by changing only 30 templates:

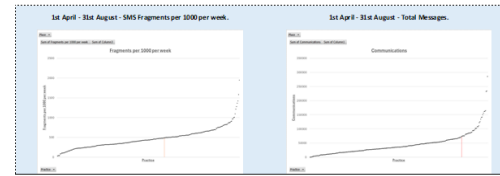
- Reduced average fragment use by 40%;
- A **55% cost saving** on the Accurx bill was achieved within the first month of implementing the change ideas;
- Average health literacy age reduced from 13.7 to 12.9.

# EQUIP INTERVENTION

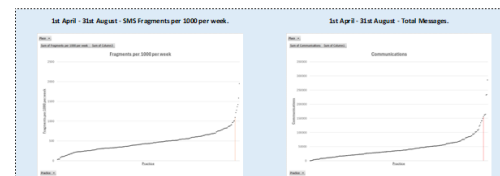
## The Problem Situation

Across NEL, GP Practices are consuming a significant number of SMS fragments per patient. The fragments are costing the practice financially. The practice is unable to utilise the money spent on SMS fragments on other aspects of operations. EQUIP engaged with 10 practices, among those two decided to commence a QI project. The Aim of the project was to decrease the average length of SMS Fragments per message to a target of <2.0 by end of April 2025.

Practice A



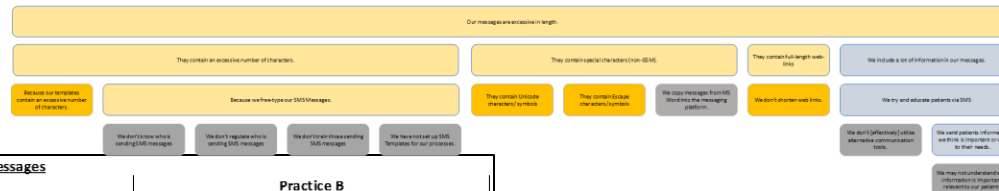
Practice B



## Problem Analysis

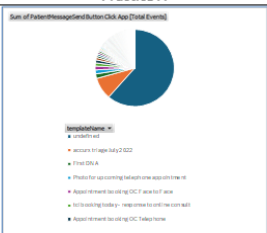
Both practices chose to reduce the length of messages being sent to patients. four solution themes were identified:

1. Review existing Templates and shorten messages
2. Remove non-GSM Characters from Templates
3. Reduce or Remove URL Links from SMS Message Templates
4. Undefined/ Free-Typed SMS Workshop

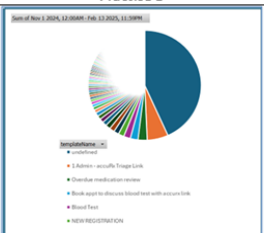


### We free-type our SMS messages

#### Practice A



#### Practice B

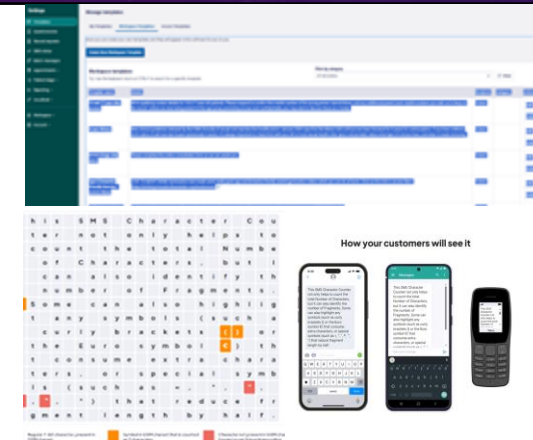


The solution themes identified two categories of SMS Messages:

- Templated SMS Messages ( 1 – 3 )
- Undefined (AKA Free typed) SMS Messages ( 4 )

## Corrective Actions

- 01 Collect accur data
- 02 Capture SMS templates
- 03 Input your data into the analysis tool
- 04 Adjust the keyword search
- 05 Review the usage insights
- 06 Analyse the results



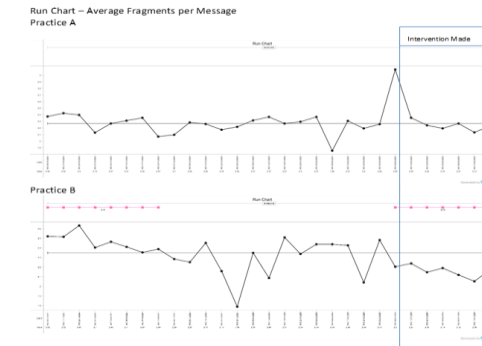
## Results and Outcomes

**Practice A:** No significant change in average fragment.

**Practice B:** Achieved a reduction in average fragment.

### Reason for difference in outcome:

- High use of undefined/free-typed messages (>50%) limited impact.
- Scope limited to Operational templates only (and not Accurx or User templates) reduced effectiveness.



## Deliverables

- SMS Optimisation Tool
- Root Cause Analysis Framework
- Toolbox Talk for staff

### Recommendations for future improvement:

- "Undefined" or Free-Typed SMS Templates
- Root Cause Analysis
- Data Available to Practice

### Financial impact for practice, (30 templates' change)

- Reduced average fragment use by 40%;
- A 55% cost saving on the Accurx bill was achieved within the first month of implementing the change ideas;
- Overall saving of £1,037

# PRACTICE EXPERIENCE – SPRING HILL PRACTICE

## Achievements

Cost Reduction: From £223.76 to £136.58 (↓39.0%).

Message Efficiency: Fragments dropped from 9,945 to 6,070 (↓39.0%).

Template Optimisation: Average template fragment length reduced from 2.46 to 1.29.

Substantial gains achieved through targeted message revision and staff alignment.

## Culture of improvement

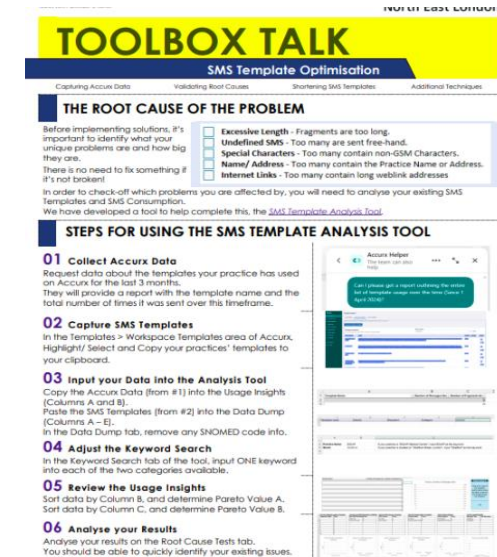
Shift from reactive to proactive communication strategies.

Empowerment Through Collaboration: The EQUIP team's facilitation enabled staff to identify and address inefficiencies.

Regular huddles and open discussions helped build a shared understanding of goals and fostered ownership of changes.

Staff across roles shared ideas, leading to greater cohesion and commitment.

Emphasis on learning from data and iterative improvements.



# PRACTICE EXPERIENCE – ST STEPHENS HEALTH CENTRE

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## Achievements

Cost Reduction: From £320.78 to £230.38 (↓28.2%).

Content Optimisation: Average characters reduced from 262 to 171 (↓34.7%).

Improvement of readability score: review the templates with patients of the PPG

## Culture of improvement

Involving of the patients in sharing their feedback on the enabled messages before implementation

Testing with a contained number of message templates



# TOOLS AND TIPS TO MAKE CHANGES IN YOUR PRACTICE



Toolbox one pager produced by EQUIP and fragment analysis tool co-designed by Accrx and EQUIP

Tips presented by Osman Bhatti

Accrx x EQUIP flowchart to understand the problem and get the solution

Collaborative review of SMS communications to align admin, reception and clinical teams on clear and effective messaging

Benefit analysis for practice alignment: Reduction in message complexity increased clarity for patient (which means less work for the practice).

Involvement of the PPG in reviewing the final draft your patients

Readability score – NHS tool

Tools to remove special characters and shorten links

Alignment with national focus on increasing the NHS app uptake



# READABILITY SCORE

NHS Document Readability Tool: [NHS Document Readability Tool](#)

Readability score is based on deprivation level, ethnic diversity, and average literacy.

Assessment of plain, action-oriented language (e.g., *“Get in touch with us”* vs *“Call reception or come in person”*).

Patient benefits: clearer messages improve patient understanding, engagement and action compliance.

Practice benefits: Investing in readability reduces patient confusion and frustration, missed appointments, and unnecessary follow-ups.



# INCREASING UPTAKE OF NHS APP

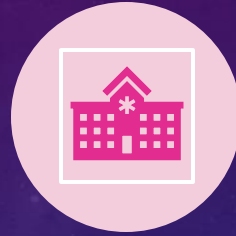
## How to improve your cost efficiency



INCLUDE DIRECT DOWNLOAD  
LINKS IN SMS MESSAGES.



USE CLEAR CALLS TO  
ACTION ALIGNED TO PATIENT  
BENEFITS: I.E. "IN ORDER TO  
AVOID WAITING OVER THE  
PHONE, DOWNLOAD THE NHS  
APP TO MANAGE YOUR  
APPOINTMENTS."



HIGHLIGHT ONLINE SERVICES:  
REPEATED PRESCRIPTION,  
APPOINTMENT BOOKING, TEST  
RESULTS.



TAILOR REMINDERS AROUND  
NHS APP USAGE IN THE  
PRACTICE ROUTINE



REMINDER: THE ULTIMATE  
BENEFIT IS FOR THE PRACTICE  
AND FOR THE PATIENTS

## CAVEATS FOR A FINANCIAL RETURN

- Reading window of 24h before (free) digital comms translates into (chargeable) text message;
- System limitation: App downloaded and notification on;
- Notification turned off automatically if not set by the patients as constantly on.



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North East London

# Final Thoughts and Questions