Using an AI-enabled Single Point of Access (SPoA) to give patients standardised choice of cataract surgery provider

Aisling Higham[1,2], Lisette Bijma[1], Louisa Stacey[1], Claire Shields[1], Rory McKinnon[1], Ernest Lim[1,3], Nick de Pennington[1], Sharon Barrington[4], Tyrone Blackford- Swaries[5]

1. Ufonia Limited, Oxford, 2. Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, 3. York University, 4. Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire & West Berkshire (BOB) Integrated Care Board (ICB), 5. NHS England

aisling.higham@nhs.net

Background

The UK NHS Constitution mandates that patients receive information to support provider selection. With an increasing number of cataract surgery providers, referrers face challenges in selecting appropriate providers based on medical criteria, offering patient-specific details like travel distance, and sharing up-to-date provider information such as wait times. To address these issues, NHS South East Region implemented a Single Point of Access (SPoA) with an AI agent, Dora (Ufonia Limited, Oxford). Dora engages patients via telephone, requiring no digital literacy or devices, facilitating informed decision-making and standardizing referrals.

This study reports the experience of using Dora to deliver a SPoA for cataract surgery in the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West integrated care board (ICB).

Results

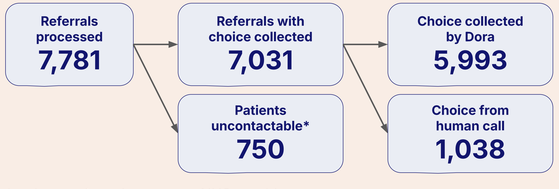
Evaluation period: 1 September 2024- 5 May 2025

Demographics

Total number of Dora calls	7781
Patient age over 70 years (n (%))	6121 (79%)
Female (n (%))	4582 (59%)

Referrals and choices processing

Referrals came from 168/177 (95%) of optometry practises in the ICB.



*patients referred to nearest NHS provider

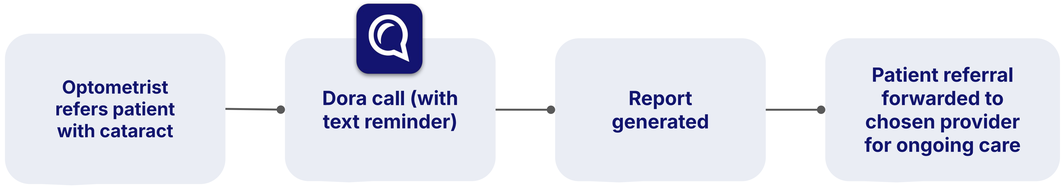
Complexity

13% of patients were unsuitable for HVLC, most commonly due to ocular comorbidities (n=443) or inability to lie flat/still (n=215).

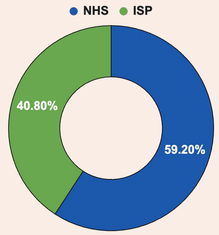
Methods

- All patients are referred directly from their optometrist to the SPoA, they then have a call with Dora prior to their referral being forwarded to their chosen provider (See Figure 1).
- Calls are attempted at least 4 times at different days/times and patients were able to call Dora 24/7 if the scheduled time was not convenient. If contact was unsuccessful, a human follow-up call was made.
- To inform patient choice, patients are informed of provider-reported waiting times for surgery, and the distance from their home to each provider. Patients that did not meet ICB-defined HVLC criteria were offered NHS providers. Patients that did not meet HVLC criteria were offered NHS providers. Uncontactable patients were referred to their nearest NHS provider.
- All patients were asked to give a customer satisfaction score (CSAT) on the call (See Figure 2).

Figure 1: Single point of access (SPoA) pathway using Dora



Choice of provider after the SPoA



After the SPoA, 59% chose NHS providers, while 41% opted for independent sector providers (ISPs) (See above).

Choice based on travel distance and waiting time

Patients generally selected their closest provider, but 27% selected a provider that was neither closest nor had the shortest waiting time.

Patient Choice Category	Number of Patients	%
Chose provider that is both the **nearest** and has the **shortest** waiting list	1,272	16%
Chose **nearest** provider (regardless of waiting time)	3,862	49%
Chose provider with **shortest** waiting list (regardless of distance)	548	7%
Chose provider that is **neither** nearest nor shortest waiting list	2,146	27%

Some patients chose to travel further to their chosen provider as shown in the table below.

Distance	
Mean distance to **closest** provider (km) (SD)	12.3 (10)
Mean distance to **chosen** provider (km) (SD)	15.8 (15)

What is Dora?

- UKCA regulated clinical conversation assistant
- Calls patients on landline or mobile
- Has a natural- language conversation to elicit clinical information
- A similar experience to speaking to a human clinician
- No apps, websites, training or smartphones required

What questions are included in the Dora call?

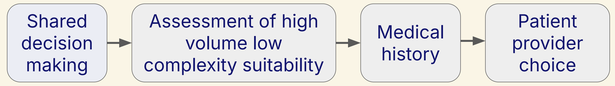
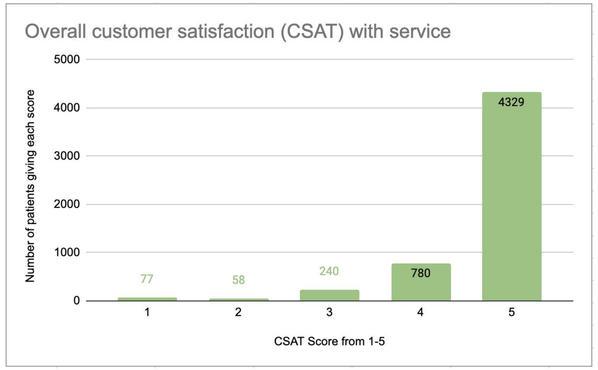


Figure 2: Patient Satisfaction with service



Scores given by 70% patients referred into SPoA.

Conclusion

- In this population, an AI-powered SPoA using Dora has been shown to be **able to offer patients a standardised choice of cataract surgery provider, using up-to-date, personalised information.**
- Using this automated approach a **greater proportion of ICB patients chose NHS providers compared to before its implementation,** and in comparison to national data from the RCOphth (showing 41% of patients had surgery at an NHS provider in January 2024).
- The system **provides commissioners with information documenting the rationale for each referral choice**. Continuity of care is maintained for patients under the care of existing providers, and patients with conditions making them unsuitable for HVLC pathways are only directed to suitable providers.
- Overall the service **scored as 'excellent' on the customer satisfaction scale**, suggesting it is appreciated by the patients that use it.

BOB Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System

Ufonia

Disclosures: AH, LB, LS, CS, RM, EL, NdP are employees of Ufonia Ltd