

Socially prescribing digital skills

A How To Guide for digital inclusion
in health

April 2018



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Introduction - a Theory of Change

Social prescribing – where patients are referred by medical professionals to local, non-clinical community services such as walking clubs or self-help groups – is on the increase across England.

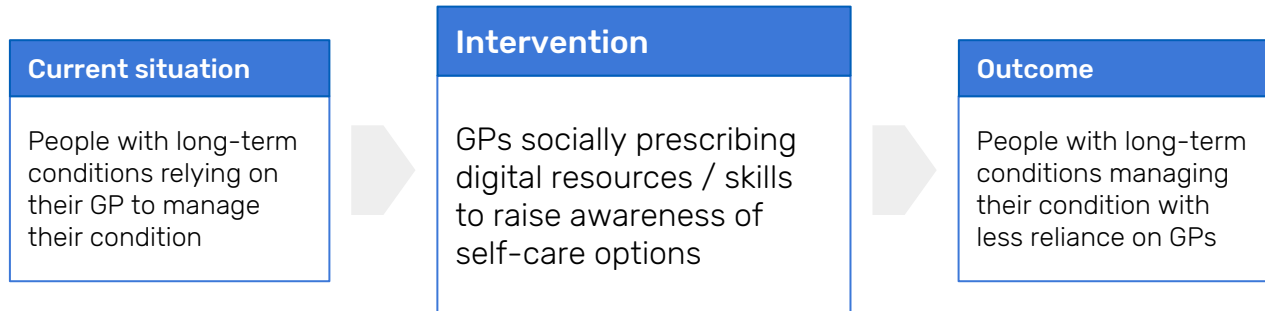
This is a welcome recognition of the benefits it can bring for patients. These include better quality of life, improved mental and emotional wellbeing and a reduction in patients' reliance on NHS services.

Digital, if seen as an enabler, can show patients all of the activities in the area, the health specific products they could use and another avenue to find peers to help support their journey.

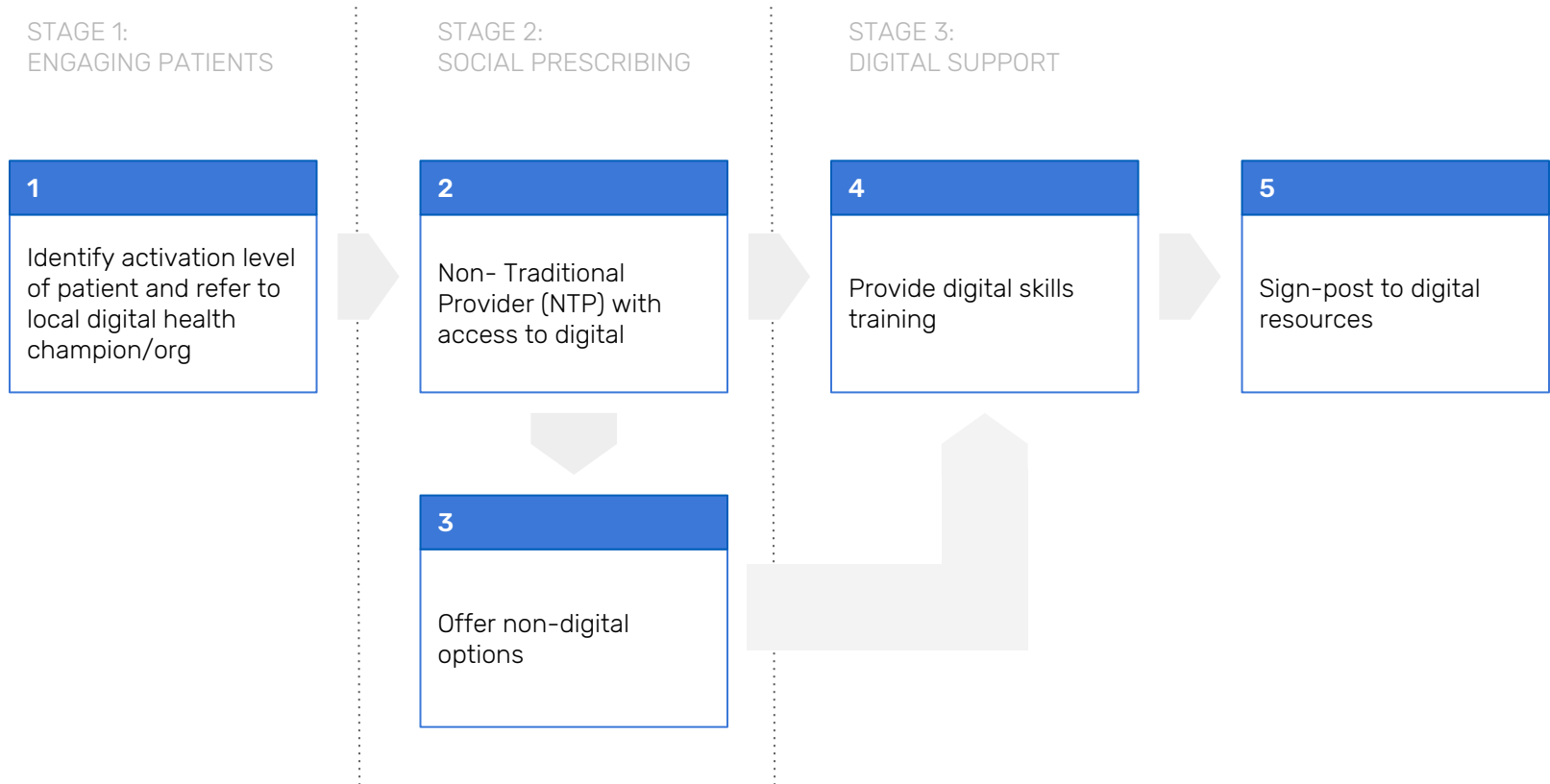
Socially prescribing digital skills is a great way to help patients recognise the benefits of taking a proactive approach to their health and wellbeing.

This guide sets out how to embed digital skills into existing social prescribing provision.

The recommendations within this guide are based on a 6 month Pathfinder project in Sheffield. For more information, take a look at the [Sheffield Pathfinder report](#).



Intervention model



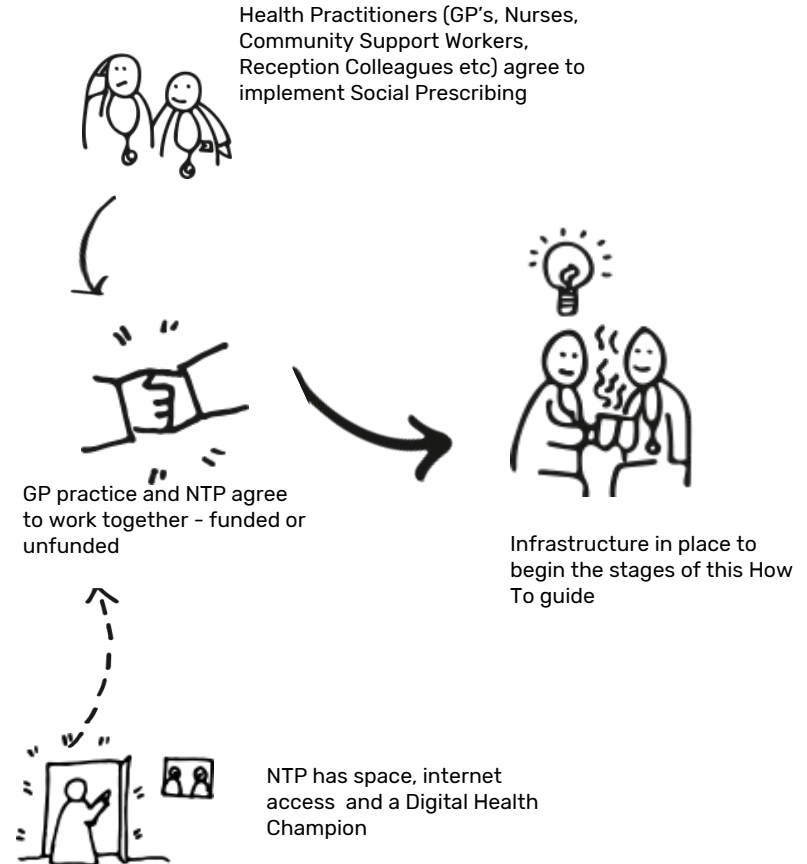
Before you start

This 'How To Guide' is designed to be flexible and adaptable so your area can use it in your very specific context.

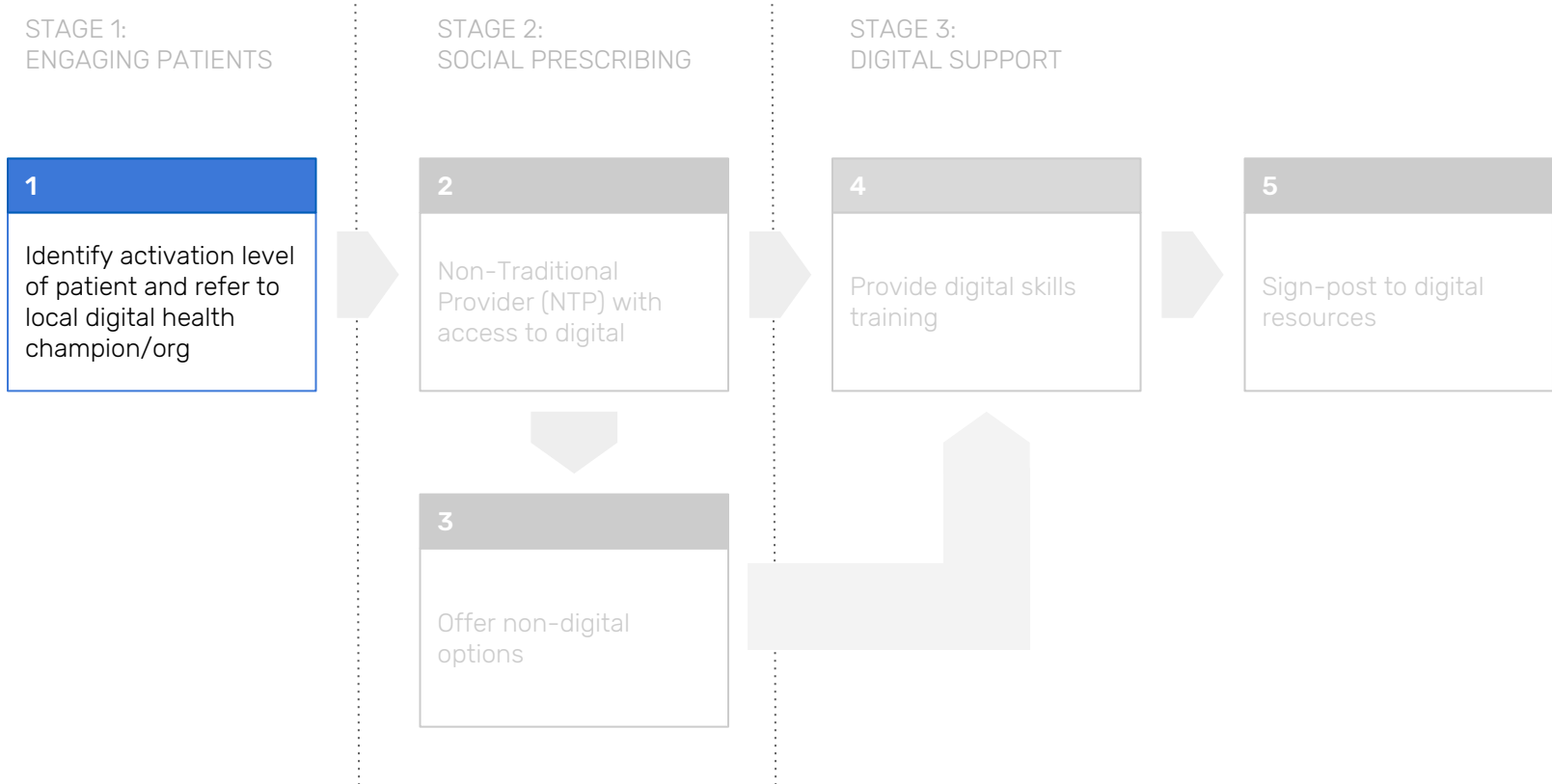
To follow the recommendations in here there will need to be some groundwork laid and that can take time and effort. The local context of implementing this model is important and will have as many iterations as there are localities across the country.

There are two main things to have in place before beginning to use this guide;

- 1) GP practice colleagues being bought into the benefits of social prescribing. A collective decision to implement social prescribing and willingness to investigate what organisations are in your area that may be able to help - then work collaboratively with them.
- 2) Creating a formal relationship with a 'Non- Traditional Provider' (NTP) e.g. a local member of the [Online Centre Network](#). This could also be any local community asset in the locality that can provide help and can be referred to.



Stage 1 - Engaging Patients



STAGE 1: Engaging patients

The first stage is identifying patients that could benefit from a social prescription and digital. Sheffield practices have implemented a [quadrant model](#). Patients are measured on their activation (using PAM in Sheffield) at a 'birthday review' and prescribed an appointment with the NTP - either in the practice or at the NTP building.

The birthday review allows space to jointly agree goals for the patient and to congratulate them on their activation and activities so far.

Patients who would benefit from a referral to the NTP are given an appointment slot.

This referral is not to show the benefits of digital, rather to show the health benefits of non-clinical activity. Digital will form part of the follow up with the Digital Health Champion at the next stage.



Patients with Long term Condition invited to a birthday appointment - in their birthday month for ease of remembering



Health Professional and patient jointly agree goals and discuss activation. Health Professionals books an appointment with NTP



Patient meets with Digital Health Champion for Stage 2 of guide

STAGE 1: Engaging patients

People who are needed - Health Practitioners

GPs are key in identifying which of their patients could benefit. Their role is to start the conversation around social prescribing and provide the referral to a local community organisation who will be able to provide the digital skills training required.

Practice Nurses play a similar role to the GP in identifying patients who would benefit from socially prescribed digital skills.

Community Nurses affiliated with practices are also able to identify patients who would benefit and refer them to the GP or Practice Nurse.

Reception Colleagues are ideally placed to increase self referrals to the NTP and also advertise the convenience of digital transactions such as ordering repeat prescriptions online

Resources that are needed

A survey that GPs and Practice Nurses can use to measure the activation level of a patient. [The Patient Activation Measure](#) is one way to do this.

A single point of referral for health professionals as they are time poor and often unable to keep up to date with changing provision. We have found that funding an NTP e.g. [Online Centre](#) allows for a trusted, non judgemental discussion.

A social prescription pad to give patients an official prescription that they are able to take to the local community organisation to help them start the conversation when they get there.

A digital record of all patients who have been socially prescribed. This needs to be accessible by the NTP so they can keep track of the patient's progress against their prescription. This could be as simple as a list of patients, what they were prescribed and whether they turned up.

STAGE 1: Engaging patients

Don't:

- Mention digital. Digital is a misunderstood term which can scare people and disengage them from the conversation. Digital and digital skills are not the solution, they're an enabler to better health and wellbeing.
- Say, "Go to XXXX and they will give you the digital skills to look for helpful Apps for your condition". This puts patients off and puts artificial hurdles in the way of their activation.

Do:

- Talk about the benefits of a social prescription to their health and feeling better. Digital skills may be one of a number of options for them so talk about different examples, not just digital ones. E.g art groups, walking groups, gym etc
- Agree goals together (GP and patient) and mention that the referral to the NTP is to help find the local things that will help.

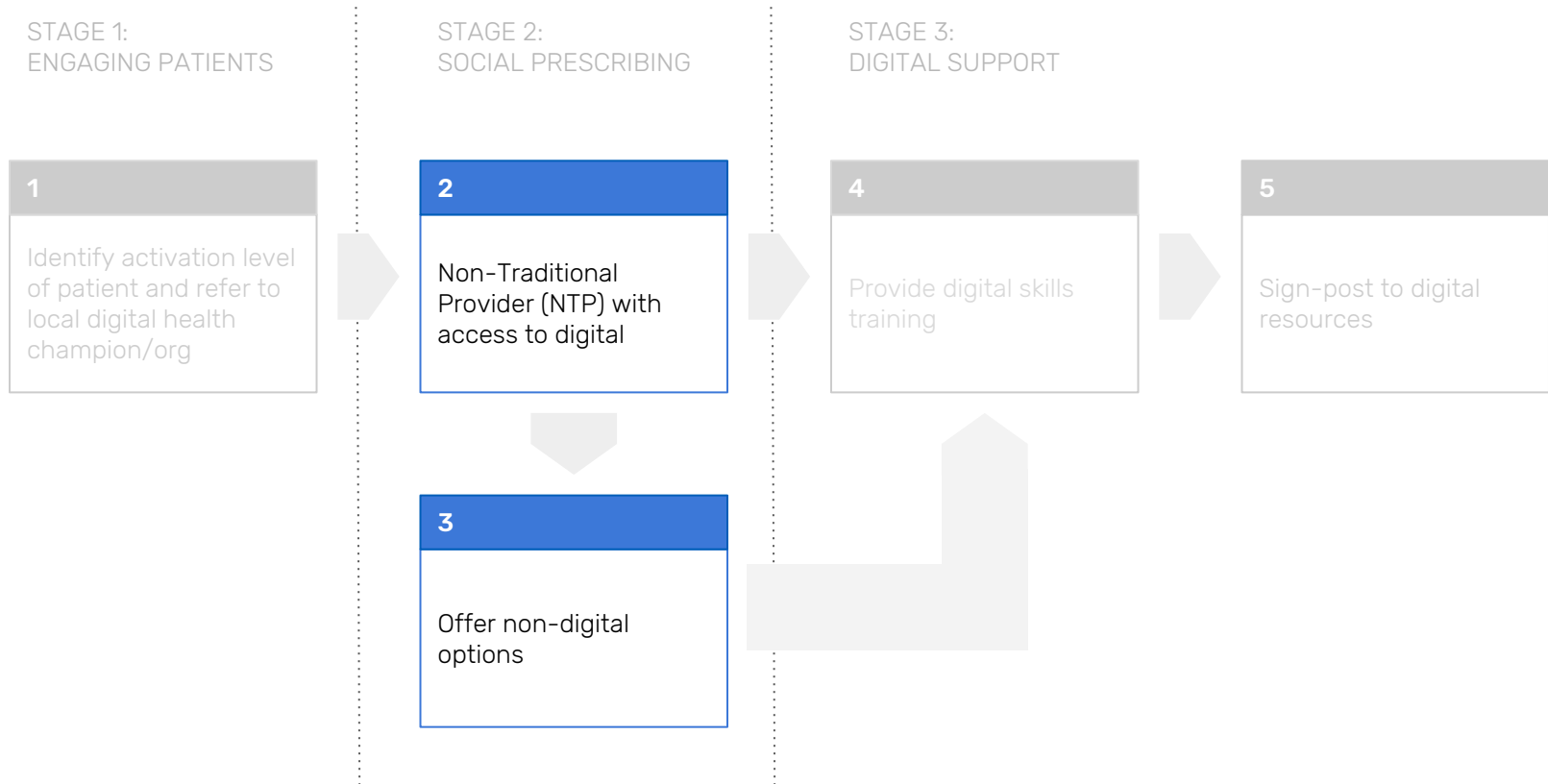
Don't:

- [Place a 'Digital Health Champion' in a waiting room](#) advertising the benefits of digital - particularly booking a GP appointment online - the patients are 'not there to be pestered'.
- Assume that all practice staff are digitally confident. If they aren't confident in the benefits of digital it won't be sincere when they prescribe patients. Practice staff should spend time with 'digital health professionals' to understand what happens and it's corresponding value

Do:

- Train up reception colleagues on the benefits of GP appointment booking and electronic repeat prescriptions.
- View electronic appointments as a more convenient transaction for a patient and sell its benefits as this. Remember the patient doesn't necessarily feel this benefits their health so don't try and promote as such unless you have strong evidence

Stage 2 - Social Prescribing



STAGE 2: Social prescribing

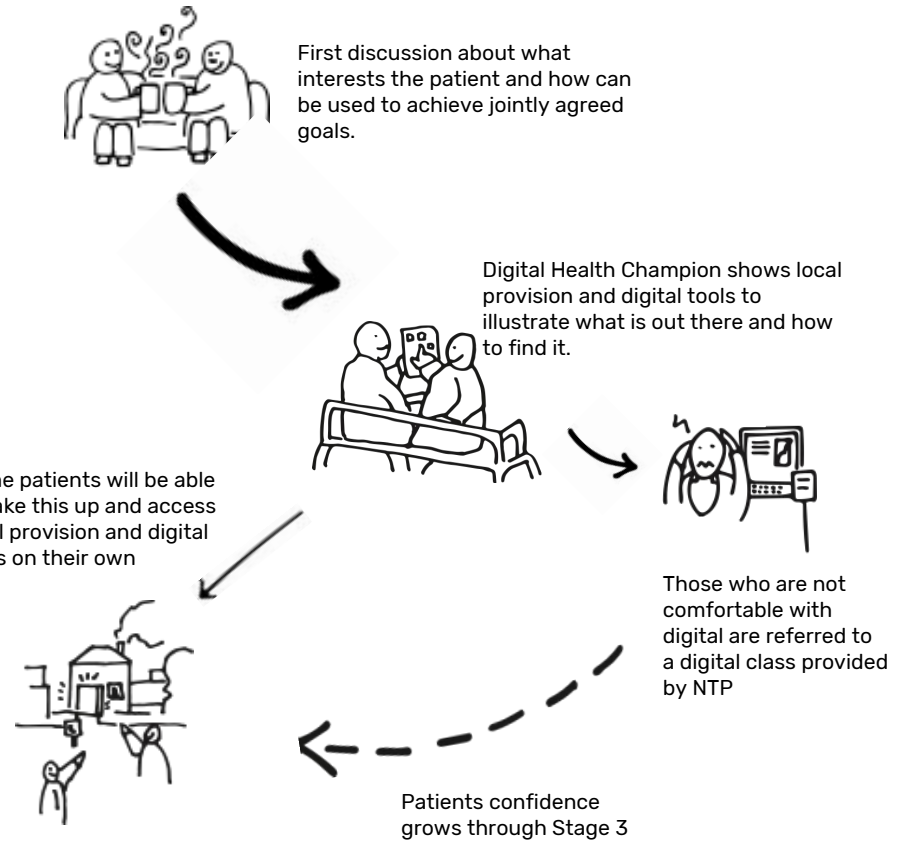
The patient attends an initial appointment with the Digital Health Champion to talk about the jointly agreed goals from Stage 1 and find out what interests the patient.

The Digital Health Champion has access (although restricted) to the patient record so they can see the goals and update on progress. This gives the conversation structure.

The Digital Health Professional discusses activities that interest the patient and looks up local providers e.g. gyms, walking clubs, knitting classes etc that may not be provided by the NTP. This introduces digital in an informal way. Some patients will be able to take things from here and attend the non digital provision.

Digitally capable patients will also be shown useful tools and products by the Digital Health Champion that are specific to their condition and can be used in the patient's own time.

Those who do not have digital skills/access progress to stage 3 of the guide.



STAGE 2: Social prescribing

People who are needed

Non-Traditional Provider (NTP)– organisations that provide both formal and informal digital skills training. From basic digital skills needed to access information and support online to health specific digital knowledge. These organisations must be accessible, friendly places who have the capacity and time to welcome and support patients who have been referred to them. [Online Centres](#) are a perfect example of this.

Digital Health Champions – people (based in NTP's) who have experience of using digital to benefit health and wellbeing. They will have the confidence to be able to talk to patients in a non-medical, non-judgemental way to ensure they break down any fears that the patient may have.

Peers – usually based in the community orgs (but could be in PPG's) people who have similar lived experience of the health conditions or the need to learn digital skills. Being able to work alongside other people in the same position will help them engage.

Resources that are needed

Access to devices and the internet – access to the internet and a private place to talk to patients. All practices should now have WiFi.

A room in the surgery but more importantly a setting outside of the surgery for follow ups – The NTP shouldn't take the patient anymore effort to get to than the GP practice. This helps the patient access the other activities in the centre and increases awareness of local eco-system of healthy practices

Access to certain aspects of patient records (system1) – The Digital Health Champion (from the NTP) needs to know what has been discussed with the doctor in order to continue with the patient. They need to know the targets that have been agreed so they can show the most effective digital and non digital ways to achieving them,

A booking system - this could just be a shared spreadsheet with the Digital Health champion. Patients are more likely to attend when it's booked in.

STAGE 2: Social prescribing

Don't:

- Be prescriptive in how the patient can best achieve goals. The objective is to move the patient closer to their (jointly agreed) goals. The role of the Digital Health Champion is to explore all ways (digital and non-digital) that the patient can work toward goals.

Do:

- Adopt the line of "Let's find out together". It is impossible for the Digital Health Champions to know everything and by finding out together there is a more comfortable power balance between Patient and Digital Health Champion
- Talk about what interests the patient. If they like fishing then encourage them to Google local angling clubs. This introduces them to digital

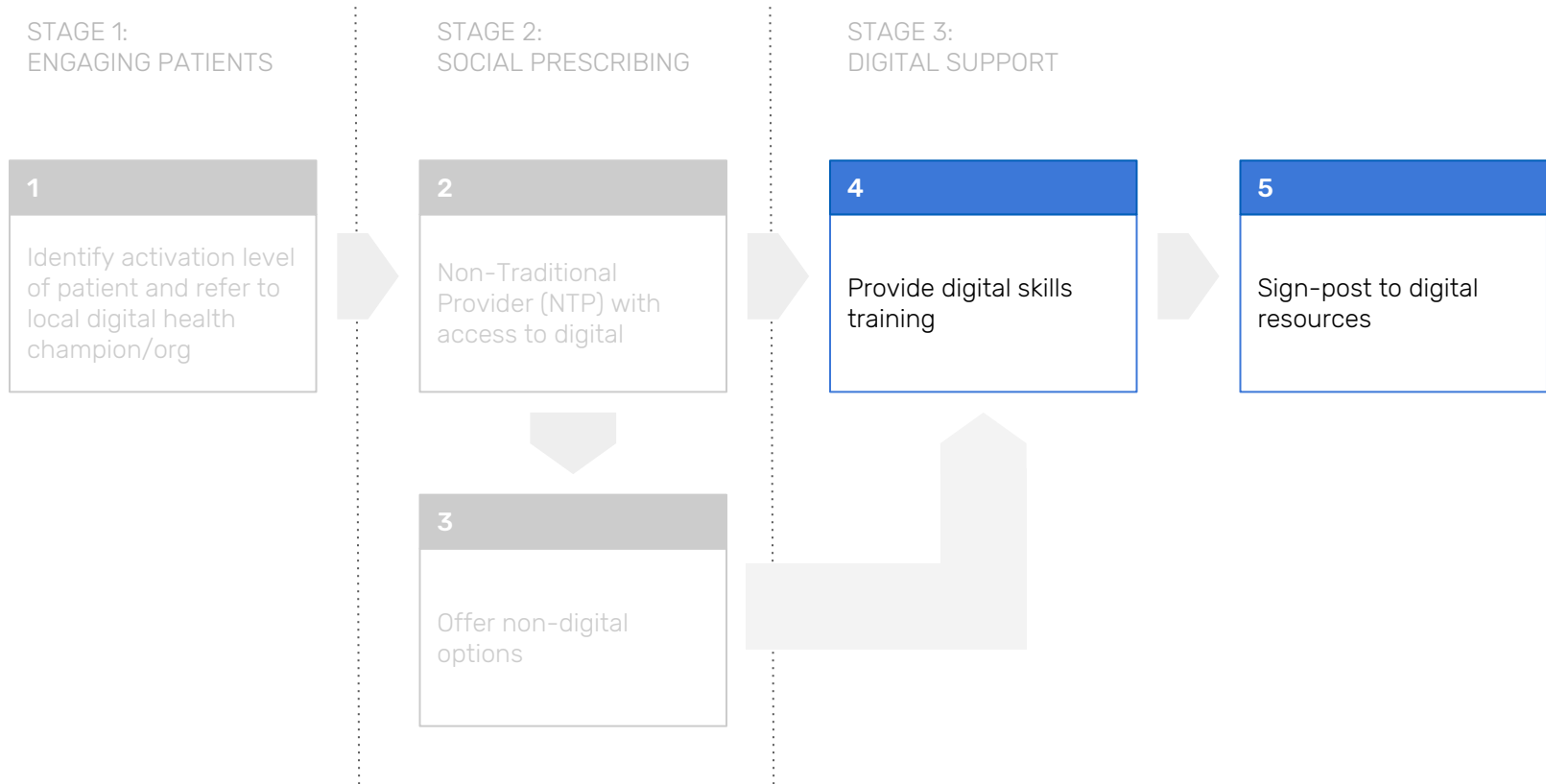
Don't:

- Call the appointment something 'digital' e.g. a 'digital surgery'. This is too ambiguous and can put the patient off attending

Do:

- Share what has/ hasn't worked between colleagues (particularly on different sites) across the GP practice and the partnered NTP's
- Have regular catch ups with the NTP to discuss the things that are covered in their appointments, this helps improve colleague understanding and increase promotion of the service
- Say things like "this appointment is just a conversation to start to see how we can all work together to help with managing your condition."

Stage 3- Digital Support



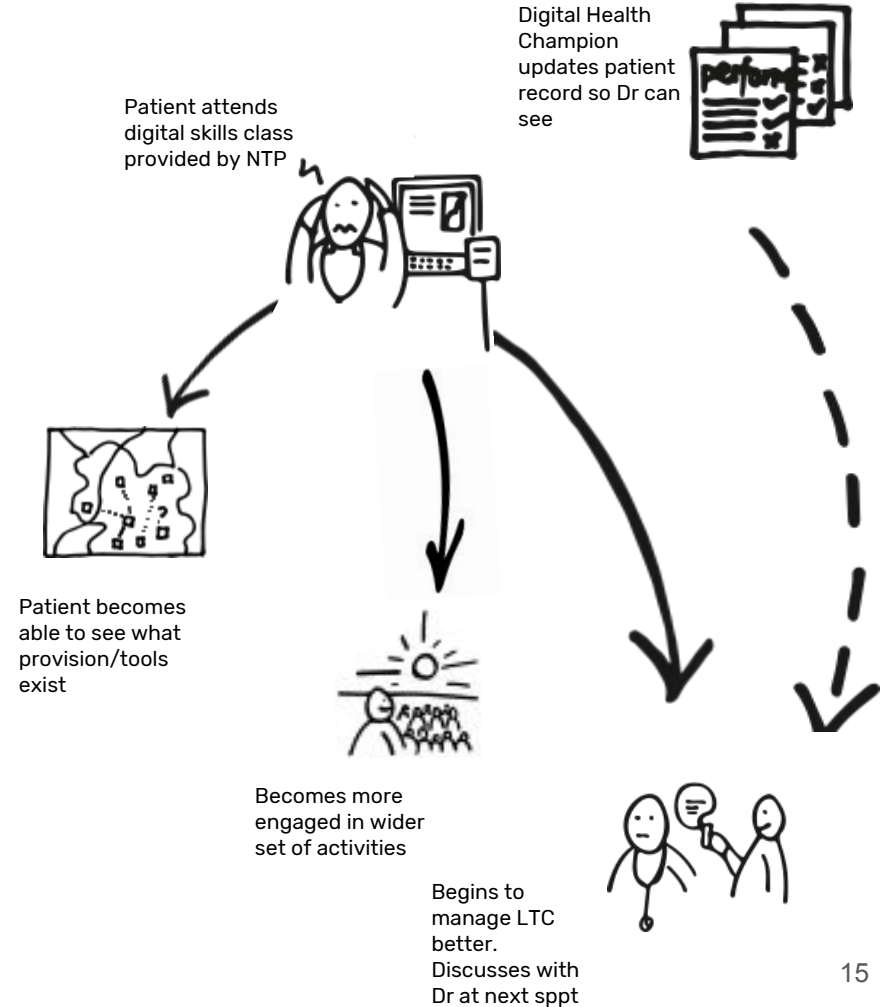
STAGE 3: Digital support

For those patients who aren't comfortable with digital then further support is offered. This takes the form of continued support from the Digital Health Professional and also a referral to a digital skills class (normally within the scope of the same NTP that is partnering with the GP practice).

From here the patient can grow their skills, gain confidence and engage in more activity as they learn more about

- a) The provision in the specific NTP
- b) Wider local activities
- c) Digital tools that will aid the management of their condition.

The Digital Health Champion then updates the patient record (SystemOne in this example) with what has been discussed and sign posted.



STAGE 3: Digital support

People who are needed

Digital skills tutors – working within the third sector organisations, Digital Skills Tutors facilitate structured classes for excluded groups.. These classes include; health, finance, safety etc

Digital Health Champions – people who have experience of using digital to benefit health and wellbeing. They will have the confidence to be able to talk to patients in a non-medical, non-judgemental way to ensure they break down any fears that the patient may have. They are also happy to discuss non digital interests to increase inclusion. This could also be a **Community Support Worker** (this is the local authority job title in Sheffield. In your area, it's anyone who spends time with users talking holistically about their circumstance.)

Other – Patient Participation Group can champion the relationship between the practice and the community organisation and therefore increase 'self referrals' to the partnered community org.

Resources that are needed

Recommended sites/apps - as a starting point have [NHS.UK](#), [NHS Apps Library](#) and [ORCHA](#) to show what's out there (and trusted). Then the Digital Health Champions 'find out together' with the patient what might help.

Google it - Showing how to get to the local swimming pool on google maps, for example, shows the value of digital being integrated into people's lives and help improve their habits

Wifi - make sure that the face-to-face location has access to WiFi. Whether in a GP private room or at the community centre

Tablet - people may want to use their own device (which is great and increases understanding) for those who don't then use a tablet as it's more intuitive and easy to share between you.

STAGE 3: Digital support

Don't:

- Expect to know what will benefit the patient. Take time to understand their motivations and goals.
- Think that because something worked 6 months ago that website/app is still relevant. Re-check what you are recommending

Do:

- Show what has worked for others but be open to looking for something else. "I know for some of the people I've worked with XXXX has really helped"
- Work on achievable goals and anchor signposted activities on patients interests

Don't:

- Dismiss any products that the patient may already be using. That leads to discouragement. If you don't think that the product has been robustly tested then say, "That's great, but have you seen this..."

Do:

- Take into account the different ways that health professionals and patients [trust](#) digital products. Professionals and patients trust their own, context specific, peers in reviewing products and this can lead to a difference in what is trusted.
- Find Websites/Apps that are recognised by both health professionals and patients. E.g. large condition specific charities, [NHS Apps Library](#) and [ORCHA](#).

In your area

This is how we did it in Sheffield. We have tried to make the model as flexible as possible allowing for local context and patient needs.

To embed this into another area we recommend;

- Bringing together stakeholders to identify 'people' described in this paper
- User insight- talk to users and understand the local context and how this model might need to be adapted to suit.

If you would like to discuss how you might be able to try something in your area please contact pete@goodthingsfoundation.org

Assets

[Case Studies for the Sheffield Pathfinder](#)

[Design Workshop 1 write up](#) - stakeholder engagement

[Design Workshop 2 Write up](#) - Porter Valley

[Design Workshop 2 Write up](#) - South Sheffield

[Design workshop 3](#) write up

[Iteration paper](#)

[Pathfinder Report](#)

[Trust Gap blog](#)

[Online Centres network](#)

[NHS.UK](#)

[NHS Apps Library](#)

[ORCHA](#)

[Learn My Way](#) - free learning tool on how to use the internet