

# NEW APP TAPS INTO TELEMEDICINE IN IRELAND

Patients can now consult their local doctor using a smartphone, thanks to the services of a new app that brings telemedicine to every GP surgery in Ireland. Developed by a Finnish healthcare start-up, the 'MeeDoc' app is offering consultations for 30 per cent less than the average cost of a GP visit.

The app can be used by anyone feeling unwell to contact a GP, discuss their symptoms, receive a diagnosis and have a prescription delivered to their local pharmacy. Using their smartphone, patients can send images of their physical symptoms, hold video-conferencing sessions with their GP, and obtain repeat prescriptions.

Developed in 2012 by a team of doctors, designers and engineers, the MeeDoc app has attracted over 8,000 registered users in Finland, where GP visits are free. It's now expanding into Ireland, the UK, Spain, Switzerland, and other Nordic countries.

Commenting at the Irish launch of MeeDoc, Mikko Kiiskilä, co-founder and CEO of MeeDoc, described it as "a tool that cuts down on costs, saves time, and gives greater flexibility to all involved in the healthcare process".

In reference to the majority of people who don't have access to free GP care, Kiiskilä said that MeeDoc's consultations are significantly cheaper than the average price of a GP visit. "It allows people to consult a GP of their choice, even if they're away on holidays or travelling for work. A user might be in a foreign country, where they don't speak the local language or don't know how to navigate the local healthcare system. MeeDoc allows them to easily connect with a GP back home."

While he did agree that there will always be a need for physical examinations and face-to-face consultations in some circumstances, he pointed out that this type of technology can save on both cost and time to provide a more efficient health service. "Research published in Finland as far back as 2004 showed it is possible to conduct 75 per cent of all primary care via telemedicine."

## IRISH GP FEEDBACK

A number of Irish GPs are working with MeeDoc, and already providing consultations via the smartphone app. Clare-based Dr Ronan Flynn, who is also a clinical director for MeeDoc in Ireland, said the app offers the type of flexibility and access that consumers expect in the 21st century.

"I know from my own patients that, for anyone working full-



Dr Patrick McSharry, a GP based in Co. Sligo, and Dr Ronan Flynn, a GP based in Co. Clare, both clinical directors for MeeDoc in Ireland, pictured at the launch on 30 November (Pic: Marc O'Sullivan)

time, it can be difficult to get a doctor's appointment that suits their schedules. Similarly, for a parent of a young family, if one child falls ill, they may not relish the prospect of having to bring all their children to a doctor's surgery.

"With MeeDoc, they can consult their GP without leaving their home. The convenience factor will encourage people to initiate consultations on issues they may otherwise ignore for too long."

MeeDoc is freely available to download from the App Store, Google Play and through a web app. Users must sign in to set up their profile. Once registered, they can access a list of available GPs, along with details of their professional backgrounds and qualifications, before engaging in a consultation. Users can select a GP, send a message and receive a reply within 15 minutes.

A consultation costs €34, €16 less than the average cost of a GP visit in Ireland, and a user's credit card is only charged after the consultation is complete. If a prescription is required, the MeeDoc GP will fax it to a pharmacy of the patient's choice, and forward the original prescription by post. For further information visit <http://meedoc.ie>.