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Digital Transformation to Improve Communication and Referrals for Patients Discharged from Secondary Care with Wounds

Introduction

Since September 2021, the Skin Integrity team has seen success while piloting and then launching Accurx's Message GP Practice at Doncaster & Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (DBTH), to ensure relevant information is sent and received by the appropriate healthcare provider to deliver the required wound care interventions in the most suitable place. Prior to this staff at DBTH would rely on patients passing on their wound care communication plan themselves to their practice nurse, or staff had to call the patient's GP practice to gain a mailing or email address to send the plan to. As well as being a time-consuming process, both methods left huge levels of uncertainty as to whether Practice Nurses would ultimately receive the information they needed. Without a clear line of communication, many patients were calling GP practices and relating their needs from pieces of paper while staff weren't equipped with the clinical information they needed.

Method

Message GP Practice, a communication platform from Accurx Web (Image 1) was piloted at DBTH for staff to send communications and referrals for patients requiring wound care interventions on discharge and met the criteria for practice nurse involvement directly to their GP practice.

Two electronic referral forms (Image 2) was developed by DBTH and was approved by the Doncaster Wound Care Alliance for communication and referrals on discharge from DBTH into Doncaster Community. Form A was for patients that are non-house bound with a wound requiring tier 1 or 2 wound care inventions and Form B was used for all house bound patients and/or with a wound requiring tier 3 wound care interventions. A discharge pathway (image 3) with hyperlinks to Accurx and the referral forms was also developed for staff to access the system quickly and easily.

The wound care tiered service model within Doncaster Wound Care alliance is as follows:

- Tier 1 – Acute healing wounds (less than 14 days old with healthy granulation/epithelial tissue)
- Tier 2 – Chronic healing wounds (more than 14 days old with 50% or more healthy granulation/ epithelial tissue)
- Tier 3 - Non healing wounds (50% or more devitalised/slough/necrotic tissue) managed with inpatient and support from a specialist service e.g. Skin Integrity, Tissue Viability, Dermatology, Podiatry, Consultant.
- Tier 4 - Complex non-healing wounds (50% or more devitalised/slough/necrotic tissue) managed by a specialist service only e.g. Skin Integrity, Tissue Viability, Dermatology, Podiatry, Consultant.

A pilot was commenced across several wards and departments at DBTH in September 2021, underpinned by these core targets:

- Information sent and received quickly and seamlessly by right place.
- To improve communication to deliver integrated and collaborative care
- This should reduce the time and unnecessary work for staff.
- To enhance the experience for patients.

Results

During the pilot the Skin Integrity Team at DBTH worked closely with Accurx having fortnightly feedback as well as monthly check in meetings through the entire implementation. Throughout, we continually shared feedback to help us improve the pathway and tailor it to the needs of patients and staff. The Skin Integrity team met with all of the Ward and Department Managers to present the new process using the Accurx system, provide them with an easy guide video to follow, and to troubleshoot any questions. To publicise the roll out to the wider Trust, group chats and social media were used. Key to Message GP Practice is the idea of connecting clinicians across primary and secondary care. We've found that giving staff in the Skin Integrity team a direct means of communication with a discharged patient's GP doesn't bring benefits to our services, and patients, but gives time-pressed GPs greater clarity over the care they provide.

The Message GP Practice pilot delivered five benefits:

- Practice Nurses able to run appointments more efficiently
- Increase safe effective care by having relevant information provided
- Significant time saved sending and receiving information
- Quick and effective information sharing
- Timely care delivery

Image 1

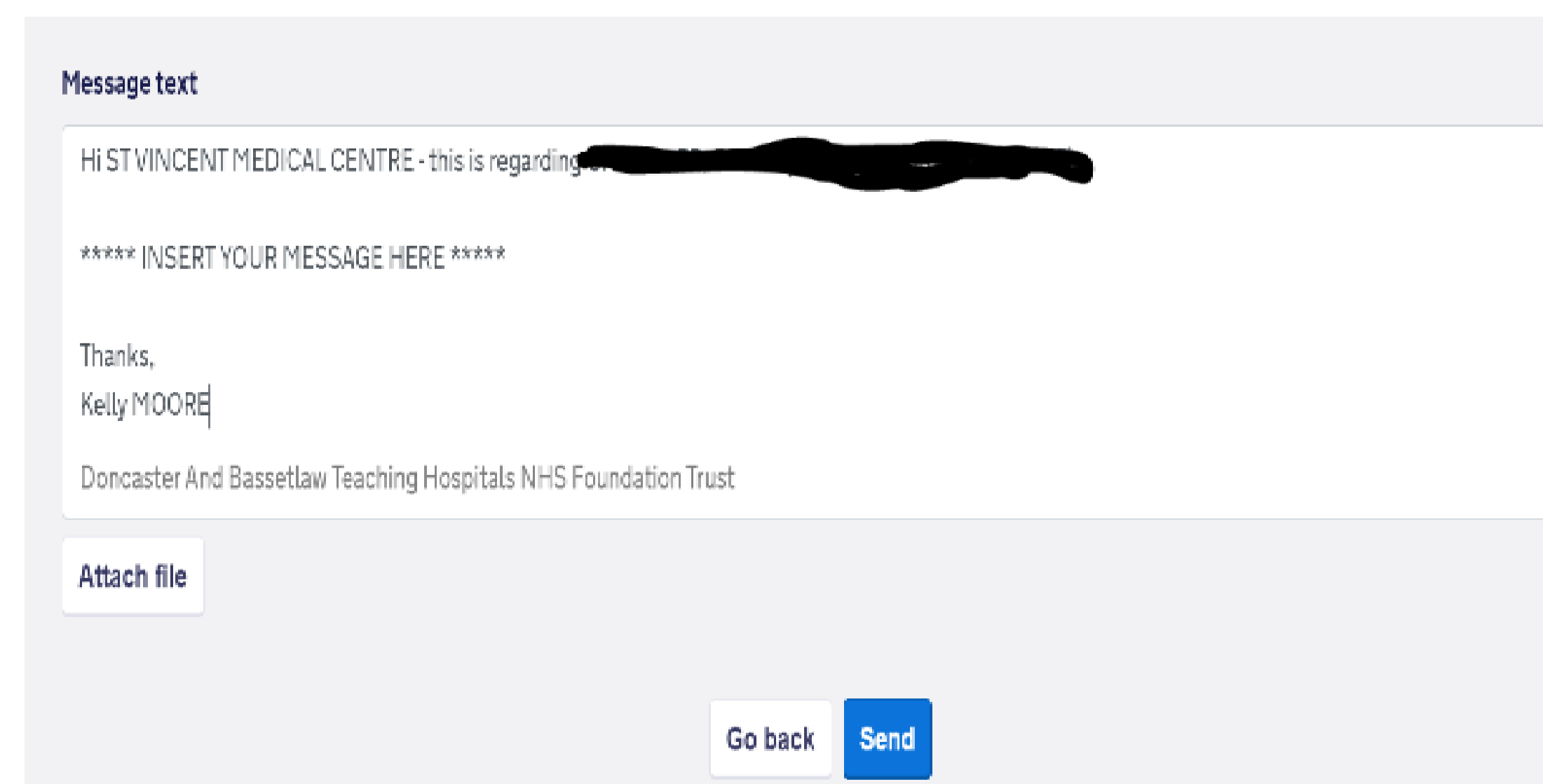
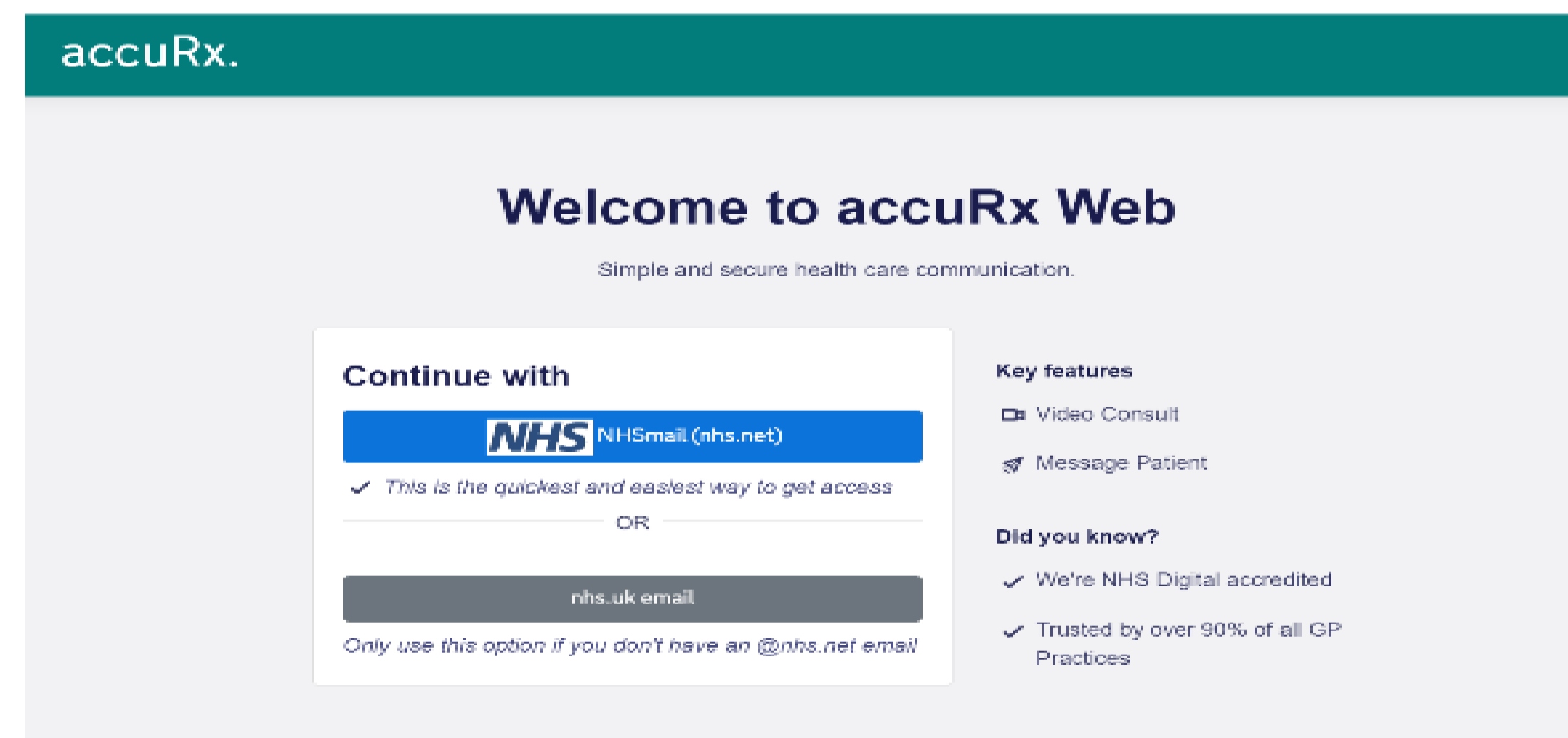


Image 2

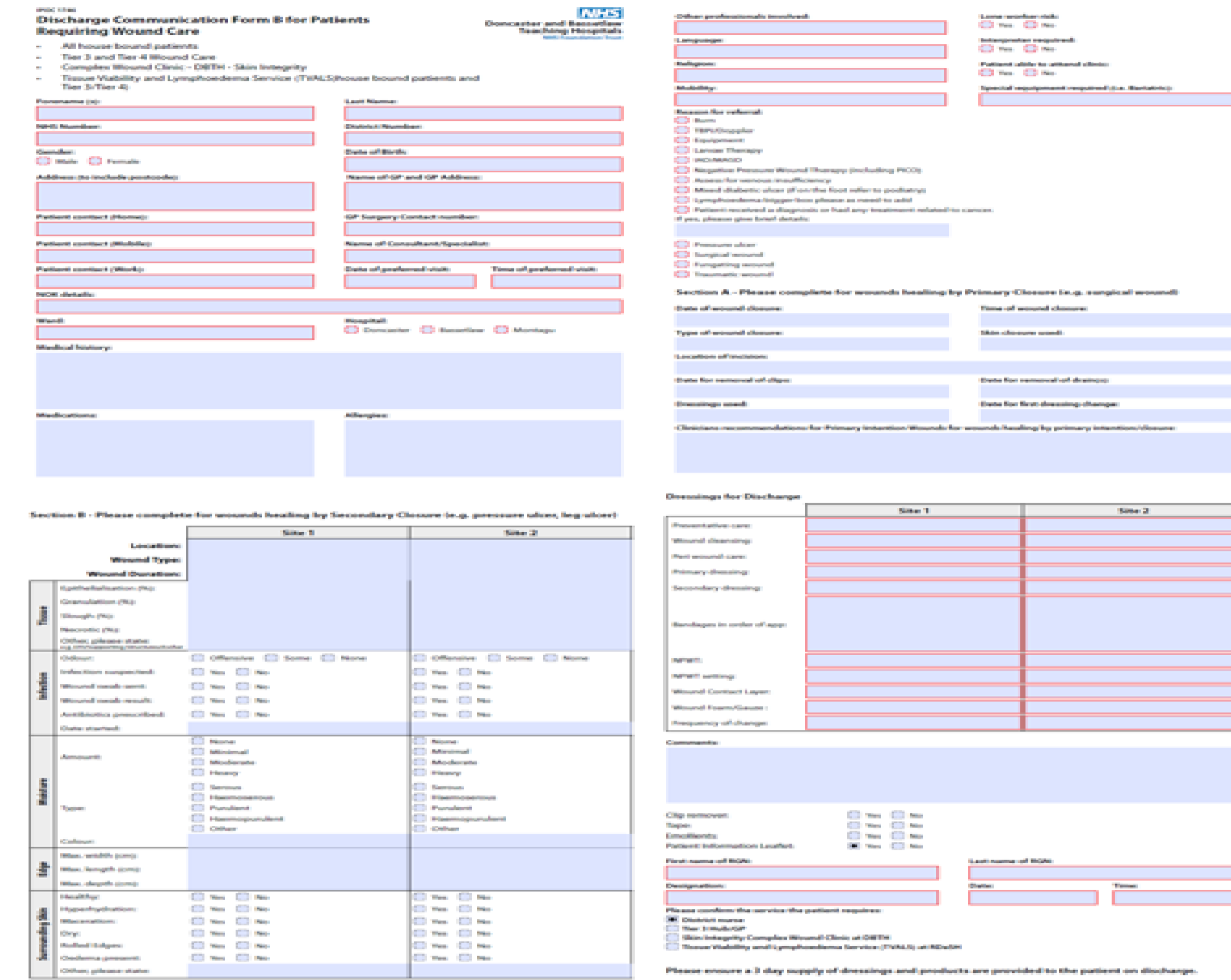
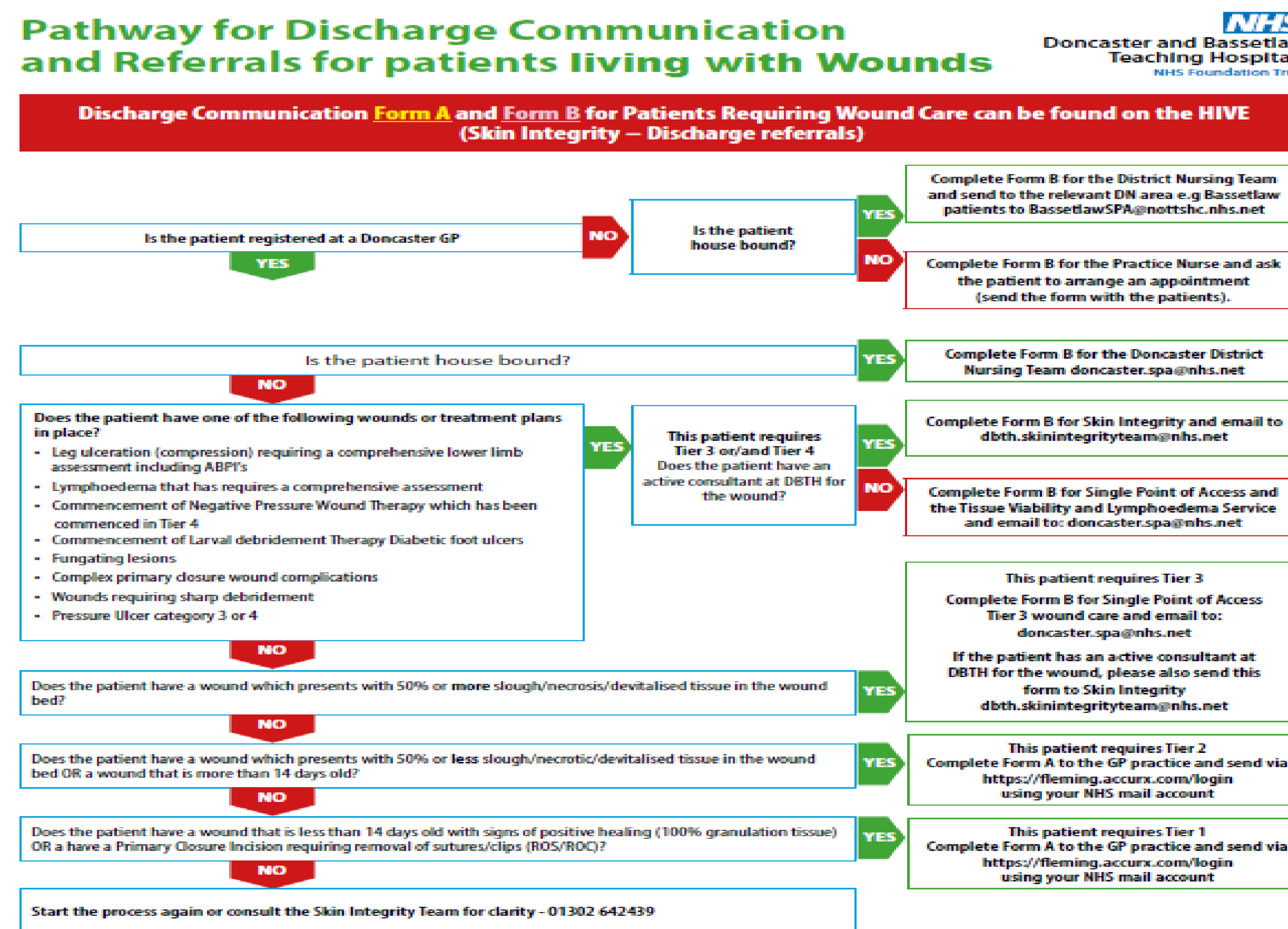


Image 3



Discussion

Delivering truly integrated care requires healthcare professionals to work as one team around a patient. Across the healthcare system, this is made difficult by outdated routes of communication - be that sending a letter or waiting on hold to speak to the reception team at a GP practice. The pilot has been a powerful indication that simple and easy-to-use solutions can enable better communication between services and better access to patient information. This ultimately enables healthcare staff like ours to work more easily as a team and deliver better patient care. Electronic message services help NHS staff across different services achieved better partnership working and improves patient care and services.

Message GP Practice allows NHS staff to send messages about a patient directly to their GP practice without having to look up any contact details and is a feature of the communication platform Accurx Web. It allows NHS staff to send messages about a patient directly to their GP practice without having to look up any contact details. All correspondence - including any documents - can be saved to the patient's GP record in one click. The product leverages Accurx's adoption across 98% of GP practices in England.

Conclusion

To date, the pilot has seen our Skin Integrity Team at Doncaster and Bassetlaw significantly streamline and speed up the process of sending a wound care plan to a patient's GP practice. Speaking to Accurx, we've heard how pilots like this are invaluable in providing learnings for how they build their software. This enables them to use their pilot with us at Doncaster and Bassetlaw to inform and shape future pilots with Trusts right the way across the NHS. Based on the outcomes of this pilot, Accurx have also been able to share learnings with other hospital trusts. The Accurx team has informed us that Guy's and St Thomas Hospital are already benefiting from our pilot, while using Message GP Practice within their Rapid Access Diagnostic team to share diagnostic results quickly and efficiently with GPs.

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Statement of Interest

There is no statement of interest required for this piece of work. The content and views are by the authors.