

# Second opinion over web for cancer patients

**Robin Henry**

A new company is offering cancer patients a second opinion from experts around the world via virtual consultation.

The Trustedoctor platform aims to break down the "geographical barriers" in healthcare by letting patients securely upload their medical records, MRI scans and other documents to a website, and then discuss their case via video or messaging with a specialist in their specific condition.

The service is being offered initially to patients with brain tumours before being extended to 20 cancers over the next two years. It is supported by two British brain tumour charities.

Each consultation can cost about £200 but doctors on the platform can choose to offer their services free. The company said money raised from paid-for consultations was used to cover the costs of patients most in need.

It is one of an increasing number of virtual medical consultation services, which seek to do away with the need for patients, some with debilitating conditions, to travel to appointments.

Trustedoctor also points to a study that found 88% of patients referred for a second opinion received a refined or different diagnosis.

NHS commissioning groups, hospital and GP surgeries have been exploring similar technology in recent years and one of Trustedoctor's UK specialists is trialling the service, to be launched this week, with inpatients at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge.

Among those who have benefited is Kathleen Charles, 35, a senior analyst in Milton Keynes who was first diagnosed with a brain tumour six years ago after suffering a seizure while travelling.

After years of treatment, including surgery, Charles was hoping to come off chemotherapy earlier this year but was instead told there were signs of another tumour, this time on her right frontal lobe, according to her husband, Jason Charles.

She was referred to Trustedoctor by the Braintrust cancer charity and received consultations from specialists in America and Switzerland via video call from their living room.

The specialists raised the possibility of trying other treatment techniques and offered a different prognosis. The couple said the consultations had given them fresh hope and "more options".

Trustedoctor was the brainchild of Greg Jarzabek, a former banker, who developed the platform after struggling to find the right specialist when his mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2011.

One of the specialists to have signed up is Paul Grundy, lead neuro-oncology surgeon at University Hospital Southampton and Spire Southampton Hospital. He said: "There are clear guidelines recommending that patients are treated by specialists.

"Specialists use healthcare resources more efficiently and, most importantly, provide patients with the best outcomes for their particular brain tumour."

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