

eHealth Virtual Visit in Austria

Virtual patient visits overcome mountainous challenges

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An Austrian hospital group has introduced online consultations using the eHealth Virtual Visit solution from Siemens Healthineers. After launching in summer 2021, the service has proven a big success – as the feedback from both patients and physicians shows.



Baroque architecture, vibrant green foothills, and snow-capped Alps: Salzburg is an undeniably beautiful part of Austria. But the mountains and valleys, while breathtaking, are a very real obstacle to accessing healthcare. Yet these geographic challenges, combined with an increasing acceptance of technology, have paved the way for one hospital group to introduce a pioneering service that brings healthcare into homes throughout the state and beyond.

Introducing the Salzburger Landeskliniken

The Salzburger Landeskliniken (SALK) are a hospital group with five individual sites, two of which comprise Salzburg University Hospital. SALK runs 45 specialist clinics and

departments and treats around 1.2 million patients each year. This makes SALK the largest healthcare provider in the state of Salzburg.

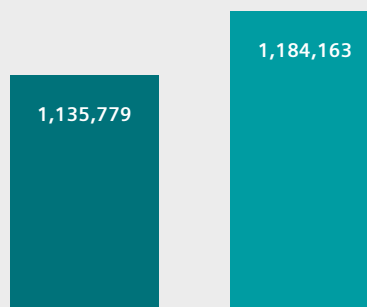
Although it mainly serves Salzburg residents, treating about two-thirds of the local population, SALK also attracts patients from other regions and countries. Due to the close proximity, many patients travel here from Bavaria in Germany, for instance. Some of the group's EU-wide work also takes place within European Reference Networks.

SALK is known for the quality of its comprehensive, interdisciplinary services – impressive in a country whose entire healthcare system is excellent by global standards. SALK also conducts outstanding research and is home to multiple internationally known centers of expertise.



Between
2021 and 2022
outpatient
admission rates
increased by

4.3%



The challenge: Geography

Even the best healthcare still cannot overcome the realities of geography – and in an Alpine region such as this, geography can be a serious obstacle to accessing medical treatment and support. For patients living in more remote parts of the mountainous state, the journey to one of SALK's hospitals can be long and difficult. Regardless of the distance, attending appointments in person is especially hard for the elderly and handicapped, and can be especially burdensome for those who require frequent check-ups. In winter, travel becomes even more challenging.

The solution: Telehealth

A desire to solve these problems led SALK to begin developing a telehealth solution with

Siemens Healthineers. The online service was a key part of a digitalization initiative launched two years ago by Paul Sungler, Managing Director of SALK¹. It was clear that digital health services had the potential to add value to patient care – and an internal survey later found that two-thirds of users (physicians and care teams) felt positive about the new service.

The solution from Siemens Healthineers – eHealth Virtual Visit – allows medical staff onsite to conduct virtual consultations while patients stay in their homes. At SALK, an average of 43% of in-person appointments can take place virtually. Siemens Healthineers provided the technology to build the platform, and the implementation phase at SALK took about six months. Special attention was paid to integrating the solution into existing systems and making it as user-friendly as



"Siemens Healthineers is already our partner in the ELGA platform, and they stand out because they have high flexibility and full interoperability. That is incredibly important for us."

Paul Sungler, MD
Managing Director
Salzburger Landeskliniken GmbH

possible. Many organizational issues were also addressed, including the legal situation, liability, risk management, data privacy, and guidelines for use by health professionals.

The platform, which makes SALK a pioneer in the hospital-care sector, is a part of Austria's federated, national electronic health record system (ELGA²) and has been in use since December 2016. It is updated regularly through SALK's ongoing partnership with Siemens Healthineers.

With full access to digital patient data

The virtual consultations are a huge advantage for SALK's patients, as we will see below. But eHealth Virtual Visit is more than a video

conferencing platform: It also harnesses the benefits of Austria's electronic health record system (ELGA), which covers 97% of the insured population. During a virtual consultation, physicians can access a patient's electronic health record and view all the information they need to provide optimal treatment and high-quality care, while adhering to GDPR. They can also add new information to the local information system, such as diagnoses and treatments, meaning that the patient's history is always up to date, regardless of whether their appointment took place at the hospital or online. If medication is prescribed, those details can be stored in the national medication database, which is also part of ELGA. Since Siemens Healthineers had already created the IT infrastructure for ELGA, it was ideally positioned to set up the new system to leverage the advantages of the digital records.

The story so far

By the end of 2022, the system was in use across 16 departments at three SALK locations. A total of 133 virtual consultations had been scheduled and carried out, with just 3 no-shows. Consultations lasted an average of 7 minutes with a waiting time of 2 minutes, compared to average waiting times of up to 60 minutes for in-person appointments.

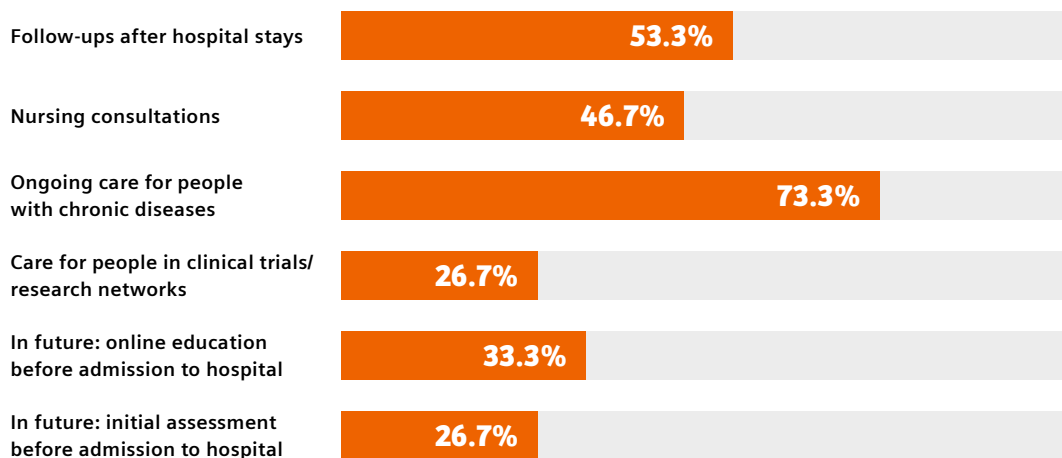
Asked about which scenarios they felt would benefit most from the SALK online consultations, users mentioned follow-ups after hospital stays (53.3%), nursing consultations (46.7%), ongoing care for people with chronic diseases (73.3%), and care for patients in

clinical trials or research networks (26.7%).

As for future use cases, respondents mentioned education before hospital admission (33.3%) and assessments before admission, e.g., for surgery (26.7%).

Other possible use cases include therapeutic interventions; meetings with parents and guardians of children and adolescents in out-of-home care for status assessment, information exchange, education, and counseling; prevention and treatment for professional athletes who are constantly on the road; and clinical-psychological treatment of people for whom outpatient treatment is not possible.

Where do you see the main use cases of eHealth Virtual Visit at SALK?



"The system is serving us well. We're a pioneer in this area among public hospitals in Austria. It's allowed us to significantly increase the quality of care for our patients because the online consultations provide a secure digital environment that saves them making long journeys for follow-up appointments."



Professor Johann Bauer, MD
Head of Dermatology and Allergology
University Hospital Salzburg



"The online consultations offer us more scope to meet individual patient care needs and to provide high-quality care support outside the hospital setting in ways that are appropriate to the specific situation."

Franziska Moser
Director of Nursing
University Hospital Salzburg

What the medical staff say

As hoped, the new system is bringing added value to patients. The feedback from SALK medical staff has been very positive.

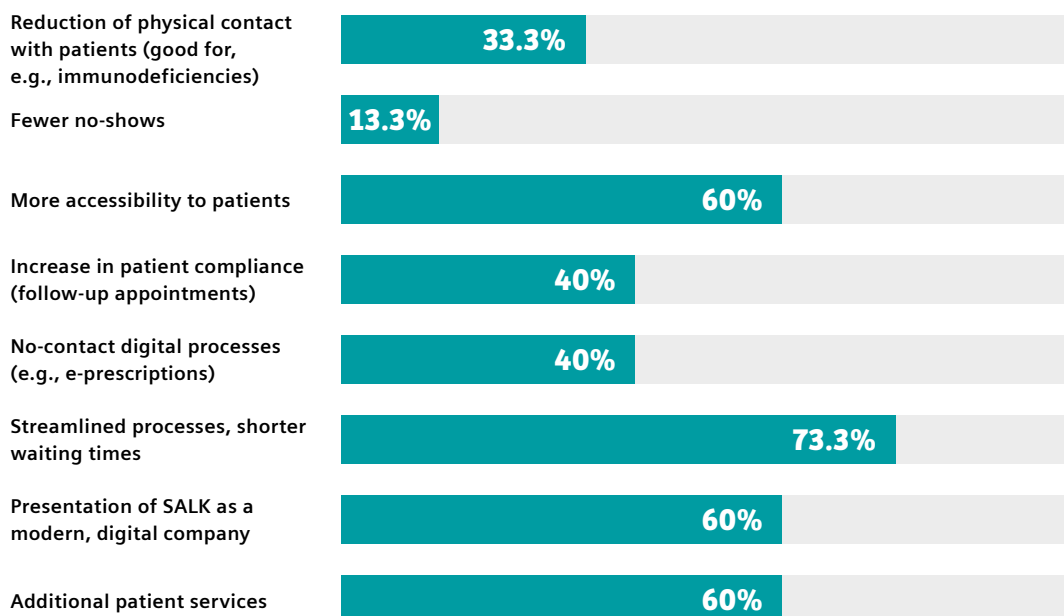
Asked about how eHealth Virtual Visit can benefit their work, staff highlighted the reduced need for physical contact (33.3%). This is particularly helpful for patients with immunodeficiencies or infectious diseases. In addition, users said the system reduces no-shows (13.3%) and gives them better access to patients (60%). It also means patients are more likely to attend their follow-up appointments, increasing their compliance with treatment (40%).

No-contact digital services (such as e-prescriptions) were also mentioned (40%), as were streamlined workflows, greater efficiency, and shorter waiting times (73.3%).

From a wider perspective, staff also felt the new service shows that SALK is a progressive company embracing digitalization (60%). This signals to patients that they will benefit from the latest innovations in healthcare, which can ultimately improve their quality of life.

Looking ahead, users noted that eHealth Virtual Visit will make additional patient services possible (60%). These include short-term home

How will the SALK online consultations benefit your work?



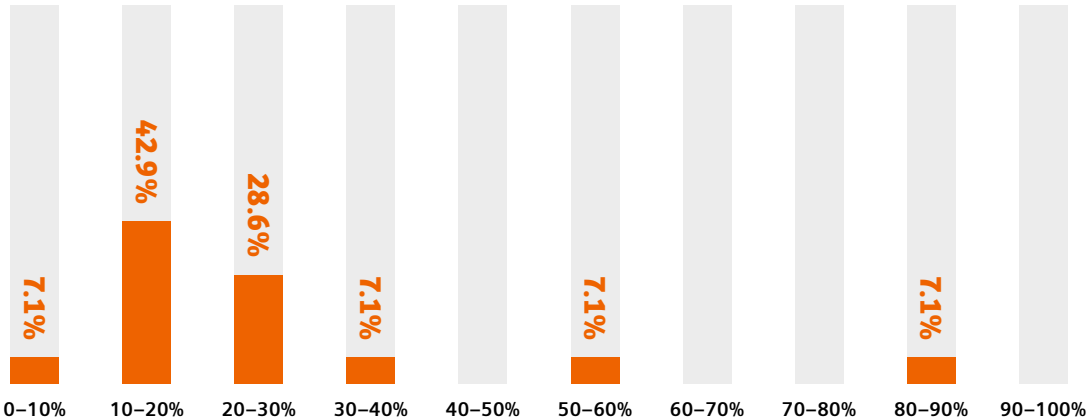
Spotlight on dermatology

Professor Martin Laimer, a senior consultant in the dermatology department at SALK, explained that online consultations give staff better access to patients. They can evaluate a patient’s health more frequently, which increases the continuity and therefore quality of care. Nursing consultations, check-ups, prescriptions, and wound assessments are also well suited to the new solution – and a particular benefit for older patients living in rural areas, as they no longer have to make strenuous trips to the hospital

treatments and outreach therapy that provides continuity for those with unstable health conditions and can enable treatment to continue during a pandemic.

Buoyed by these results, SALK sees great potential in its new system: 42.9% of users estimated that around 10–20% of examinations could be carried out virtually, providing the patient has the necessary technology at home (a computer or smartphone with a microphone and camera, and a stable internet connection). SALK will therefore continue to offer virtual consultations and will steadily increase the number of users and the system’s scope of application.

What percentage of patient contacts could theoretically be handled via the SALK online consultation? (n=14)



“Siemens Healthineers is a well-known and globally active medical technology company. I hope we will be able to build up a long-term partnership and that new software solutions will be developed on the basis of this online consultation.”

Professor Johann Bauer
Head of Dermatology and Allergology
University Hospital Salzburg

Spotlight on diabetes care

Andreas Gsenger, a specialist diabetes nurse, has found that eHealth Virtual Visit is very helpful for his consultations. It creates greater scope for advising and training patients, which empowers them to play an active part in managing their condition. And while this is helpful for any patient with diabetes, those with multimorbidities feel a particular benefit: One of Gsenger's patients has paraplegia and is delighted that his diabetes consultations can now take place at home.

SALK and Siemens Healthineers: A partnership for the future

The positive feedback from patients and users also shows that SALK's partnership with Siemens Healthineers is a success story. It is a productive continuation of the collaboration on the ELGA platform, and SALK has praised the German company's flexibility and expertise in this latest venture.

Staff at SALK hope the partnership will continue for many years to come – and that Siemens Healthineers will help the group build on its success by developing more software solutions linked to eHealth Virtual Visit. Doing so will help both parties make strides toward some key long-term goals, such as closing care gaps, delivering outcomes that matter to patients, and better connecting care teams and patients.

With Siemens Healthineers actively helping SALK to realize its vision of improving the quality and accessibility of its care, a bright future is ahead – one where the expansion of digital services continues to improve the patient experience, transform care delivery, and make healthcare in Salzburg the very best it can be.

eHealth Solutions consist of several products. eHealth Virtual Visit is manufactured by Siemens Healthineers, Erlangen, Germany. All other products of eHealth Solutions are manufactured by ITH icoserve technology for healthcare GmbH – A Siemens Healthineers Company, Innsbruck, Austria. Products of eHealth Solutions are not intended for diagnostic purposes. The product offerings are not commercially available in all countries. Please contact your local Siemens Healthineers organization for further information.

The statements, data and statistics were provided by the customer of Siemens Healthineers. What were described herein are based on results that were achieved in the customer's unique setting. Because there is no "typical" hospital or clinical institution and many variables exist (e.g., hospital size, samples mix, case mix, level of IT and/or automation adoption) there can be no guarantee that other customers will achieve the same results.

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² www.elga.gv.at/en/about/

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