

Online Consultations for Asthma Care: Evidence and Practice

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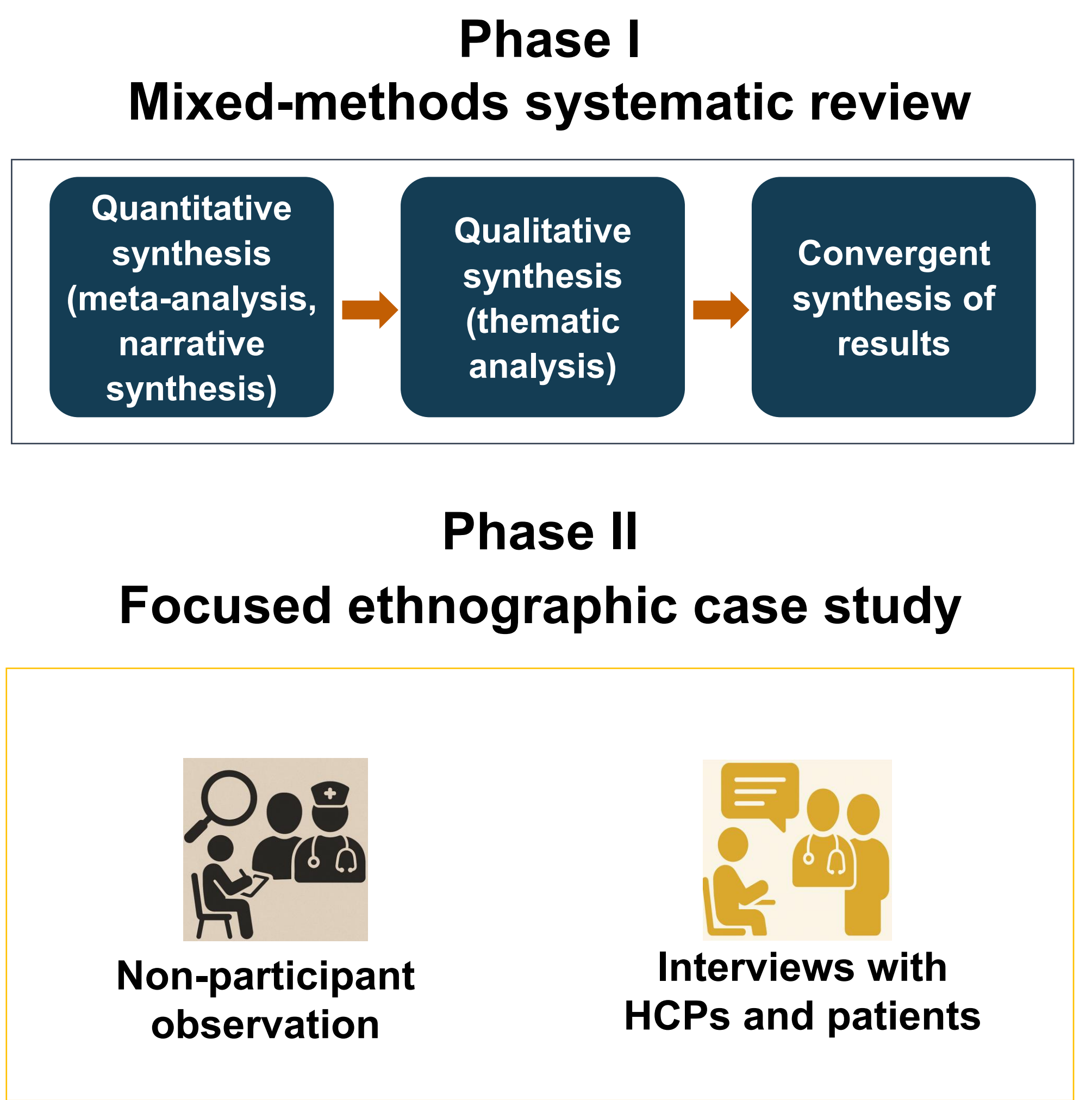
BACKGROUND
Online consultations (OLCs) let patients and clinicians communicate through digital tools without a real-time conversation. The NHS aimed to offer OLCs to all patients by April 2020, but evidence on their effectiveness and implementation in asthma care has remained limited.

Online consultation
Patients and healthcare professionals (HCPs) use digital tools to communicate with each other **without** engaging in real-time conversations.

Asthma care
Includes unscheduled and scheduled care (annual reviews), **excludes emergencies**.

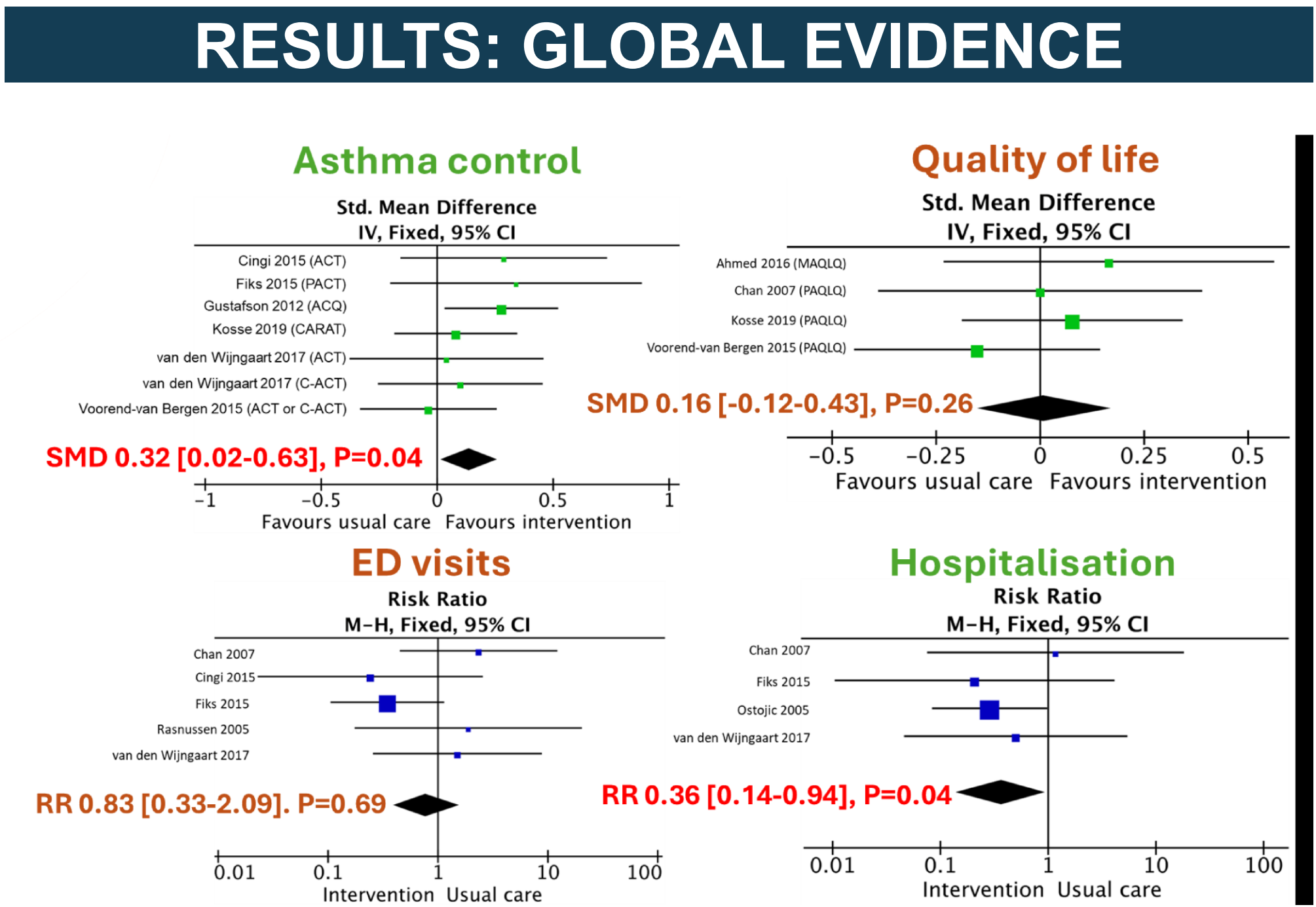
AIM
To synthesise the global evidence on OLCs in asthma care, and to explore their implementation in UK general practice, to inform recommendations for practice and policy.

METHODS
A two-phase, multi-methods study.



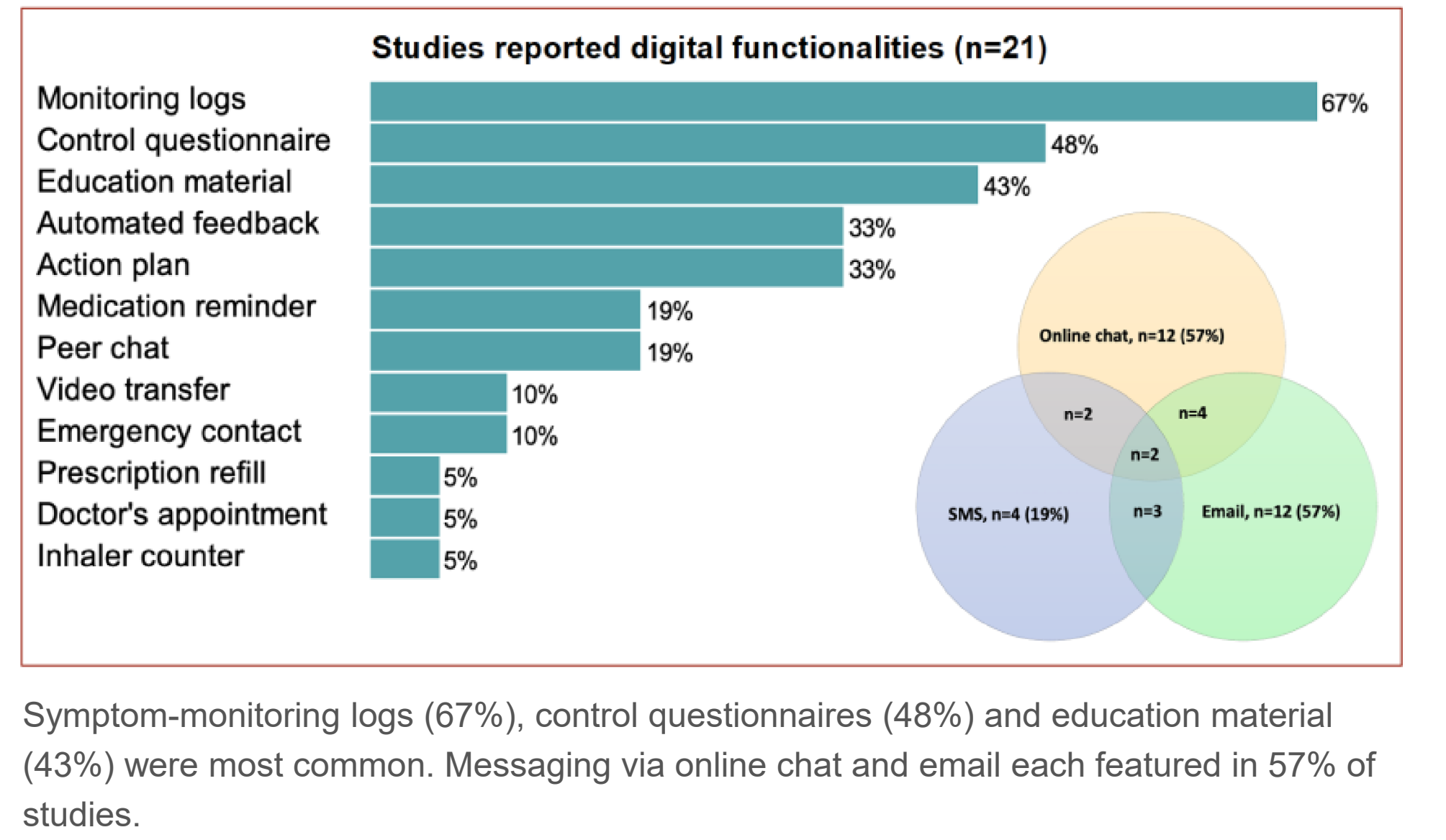
30 STUDIES **9 COUNTRIES** **3,428 PARTICIPANTS**

20 quantitative · 6 qualitative · 4 mixed-methods studies



OLCs improved asthma control and reduced hospitalisations; no significant effect on quality of life or ED visits.

QUALITATIVE SYNTHESIS
Patients valued the convenience of OLCs; clinicians appreciated improved accessibility but raised concerns about the quality of remote assessment.

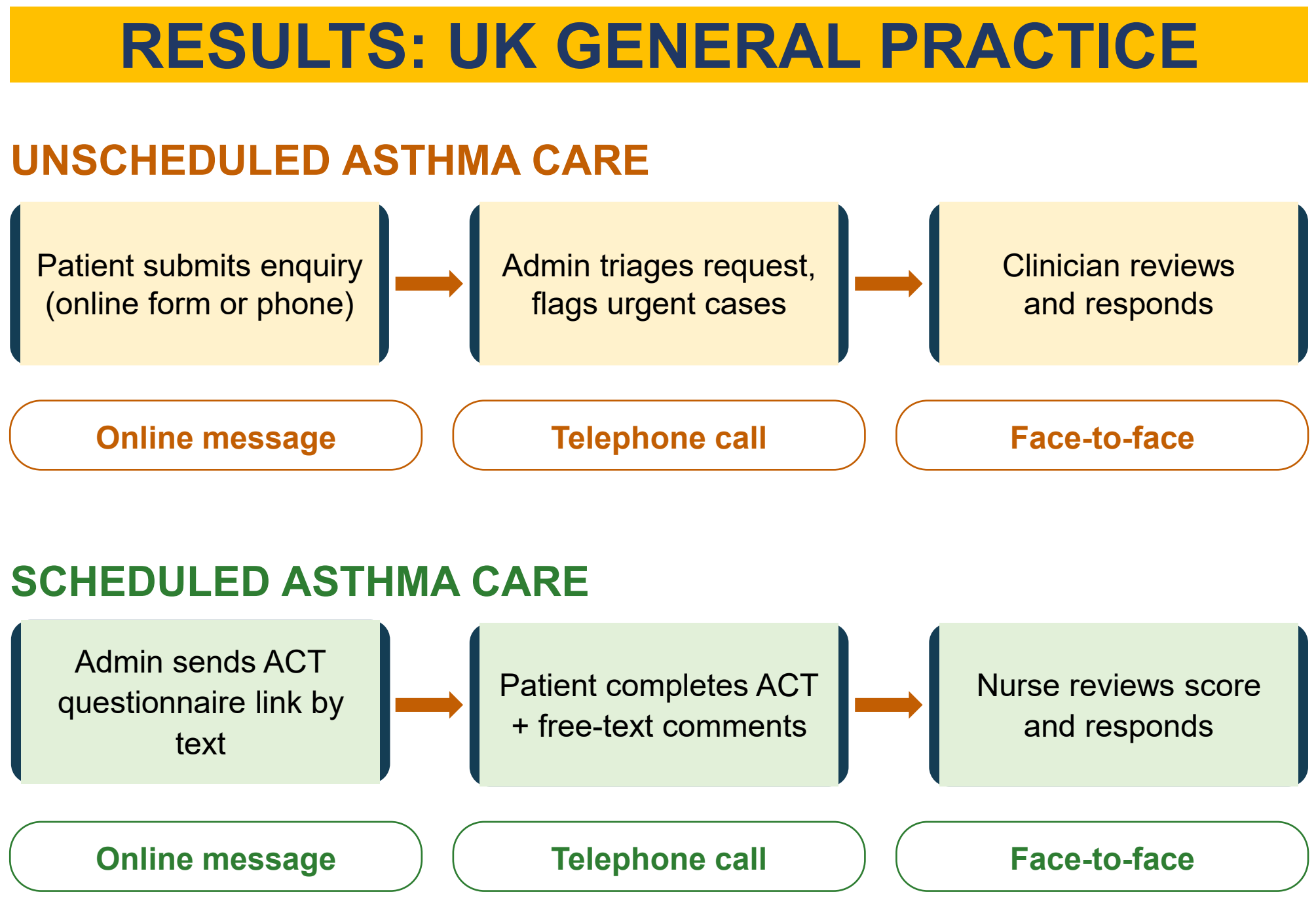


INTEGRATIVE SYNTHESIS

- Underscored that the ease of asking questions, monitoring logs, and medication reminders were key digital functionalities.
- Successful implementation necessitated an organisational approach.

4 PRACTICES **12 HCPs OBSERVED** **23 INTERVIEWS**

17 healthcare professionals · 6 patients interviewed



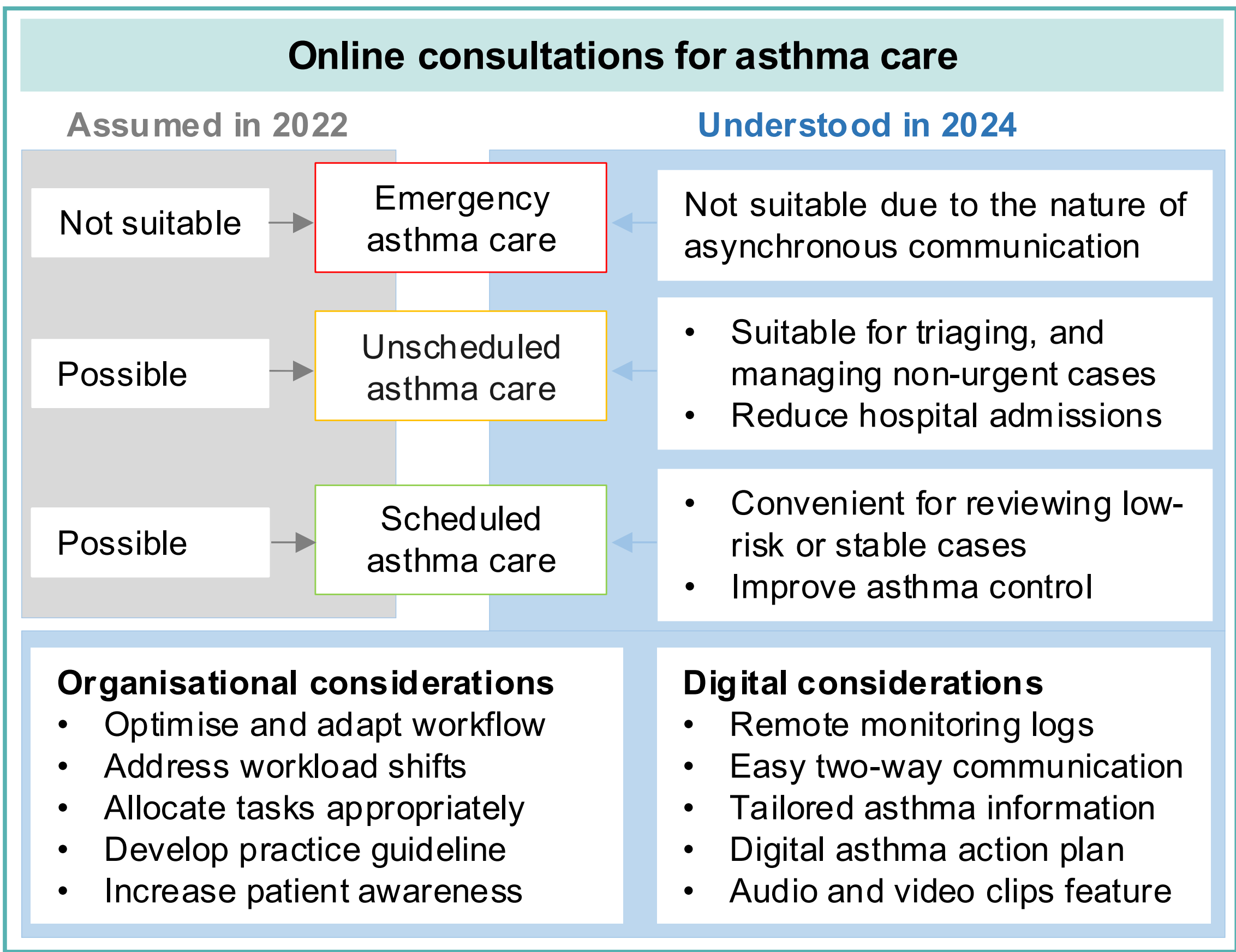
- OLCs were used mainly for unscheduled care, with limited uptake for routine asthma reviews.
- Access improved, but clinicians raised safety concerns about remote assessment, and
- Patients turned to OLCs mainly when face-to-face appointments were unavailable.

"I'm a proponent of eConsult — I think it's a useful thing to add and it gives a bit of flexibility. It redistributes the work, because a lot of eConsults end up with an in-person consultation being booked in the future."
— GP, case-study practice 1

"We have a challenge with different doctors' levels of risk. Some GPs are risk-averse and if they're not happy with an eConsult they will phone the patient to get more details."
— GP, case-study practice 2

"The benefit to me is that I can prioritise the patients with the greatest need, so I make sure I see them sooner — and potentially I see them for longer as well."
— Practice nurse, case-study practice 4

"It makes it easier for me to get like a telephone call. I can just tell them the basics of like, I can't be or my symptoms and then they'll phone back and then we decide if we want to do an in person or not."
— Patient participant, Practice 1



Probable conditions	Potential use of online consultations
Mild worsening of asthma symptoms	Clinicians can assess whether the situation can be managed with adjustments to medication and/or non-pharmacological management.
Follow-up visits	Clinicians can manage follow-up appointments where patients report their recovery and symptoms.
Minor illnesses relating to asthma	Clinicians can assess and treat minor illnesses such as oral thrush caused by inhaled corticosteroids.
Patients seeking advice on self-management or understanding their condition	Clinicians can provide educational resources, respond to questions, and advise on self-management strategies.
Patients seeking advice on managing asthma in specific situations (e.g. during pollen season or when exercising)	Patients can submit queries, which clinicians can address without an in-person consultation.

