



Personal Outcomes Stories during COVID: Learning from practice

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How have you been able to keep a focus on what matters to people during COVID?



The podiatry service has had to adapt very quickly in the way it provides its service. To protect the public and reduce footfall in health centres we have had to reduce the number of clinical locations available. A new working rota was developed which would allow members of the team to work from home and support better social distancing.

Working in high risk foot protection, we have had to ensure that we continue to provide care to our most high risk patients. A main priority is to keep high risk patients out of hospital. Managing the risk of infection by continuing to provide wound care in community ulcer clinics and through home visits, and supporting patients and carers to manage dressings via virtual appointments. Focusing care on these patients reduces hospital admission rates and attendance at A&E. We provided support to fellow podiatrists who have had to adopt new roles and practice at short notice.

District Nurses were also asked to take on new roles and to facilitate this we took on their caseloads of foot and ankle wounds. Home visits have substantially increased to provide continued wound care to high risk patients who are shielding. We wear PPE & follow the current guidelines regarding Covid 19 to protect patients and reduce risk of infection.

What have you had to do differently and what made this possible?

Before Covid, we had initially been piloting virtual (Near Me) clinics for wound review and providing support to patients and family/carers for managing their own treatments.

During this time only 16 patients opted to use Near Me and 81% of those did not attend. During Covid this picture changed dramatically and 184 patients attended during a 9 week period with only 18% not attending, with technology being cited as the biggest reason for this. Near Me has been fully integrated into our practice and become a very normal way of consulting with patients. This has been especially useful in triaging patients from care homes. Working alongside the nurses and support staff in these settings, we have been able to continue to provide a consistently high level of care.

Communication has been key between staff, patients and carers. There has been great support between colleagues and management in embracing new ways of communicating including Microsoft Teams. This has allowed us to discuss patient management plans, tweak rotas but I think most importantly allowed us to continue to interact and bounce off of each other despite not being in the same room which has definitely helped morale.

What have you noticed that has been better?

We were a close-knit team before the pandemic and we have really pulled together to support patients and each other, which has made us even stronger as a team. Everyone is willing to help each other and we have shown a great deal of flexibility and adaptability.

We have also used Microsoft Teams for clinical supervision giving us an opportunity to reflect and share our experiences of working through this strange and challenging time.

For patients, virtual clinics have given them the peace of mind that they are able to continue to access the service despite shielding, and their foot health has not suffered as a result. This has also provided support to staff and patients in Care homes & nursing homes, helping them feel supported. Patients have shown a real willingness to be more involved in their care which has been a great help to the service over this difficult time.

How did this make you feel?

The service has taken a great step forward in terms of using technology to interact with patients and carers and I think this will only get better the more we use it in the future.

Our team has certainly grown closer and that is largely down to our regular teams meetings and online social interaction. I feel proud of the way we have continued to work together as a team to provide care for our patients and also enabled and encouraged patients to be as pro-active in their own care as possible.

What have you learned through this?

Our management team have continued to be extremely supportive and have shown a great deal of flexibility to all staff. With all the change that Covid has brought, we have learned we are all stronger and more resilient than we think, that in times of adversity and uncertainty you take on challenges that previously may have seemed daunting. Our staff are willing to quickly learn new skills to continue to provide a high level of care.