



Company Number: 9887278

Company Directors

Dr May Li, Dr Anthony Morgan, Dr Apu Poddar, Dr Sean O'Reilly

COVID-19 Impact Service Evaluation

March 2022

Executive Summary

The COVID19 pandemic of 2020, has had catastrophic effects across the globe. None more so than across healthcare services, which have had to adapt health provision in ways never seen before. South Powys due to its rurality has a high risk of isolation and loneliness which has been further amplified through the COVID19 pandemic. To reduce the spread of this disease, patients identified as clinically vulnerable were asked by the Chief Medical Officer to shield in March 2020. The office of national statistics (ONS) reported that 35% of people shielding reported that their mental health has deteriorated during the pandemic. In addition, our research has shown that patients are apprehensive about responding to invitations and unsure with regards to attending appointments outside of the home.

As reported by the world health organisation, health systems around the world are being challenged by increasing demand for care of people with COVID-19, while trying to maintain the delivery of routine health services (who.int, 2020). Red Kite Health Solutions CIC is in a unique position to support people in the community who are at high risk of COVID-19 and the impacts on their day-to-day lives. The organisation is also well positioned to support organisations at a primary and local level with the challenges and demands faced as a direct result of the pandemic, due to its close working relationships with both primary, secondary and third sector organisations. This includes informing and advising patients on the new processes and safety measures that have been put into place to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in the community, services that are available to assist them with health requirements and reducing non-attendance.

This report is written with thanks to the National Lottery Community Fund and the Public, and the four South Powys Practices and employees for their continued support; without which we would be unable to provide the service. Thanks also goes to the Red Kite employees who continue to work diligently in their support of the community.

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Scope

The aim of the project is to provide a telephone support service over a 12-month+ period for patients effected by the impact of COVID-19 at a local level. Identifying shielding/vulnerable patients through the practice clinical systems who may not have accessed services during the pandemic; or who may be reluctant to re-enter society. Patients will be identified and contacted via the telephone and given advice relating to service provision that is available; the opportunity to discuss the safety measures in the practices; access to the booking of health appointments; including signposting to cancer screening, voluntary and community services and health promotion. Sign-posting patients to community services where applicable in their local area, particularly in response to mental health needs and the impact of the lockdown and isolation.

In South Powys we identified 2,122 registered patients who currently fall into the shielding category. Over 50% of these patients are due or overdue health checks for their conditions that cannot be carried out over video/telephone consultation. In addition, many may be suffering from the effects of social isolation and unaware of the services that are available to assist them with medication, transport or other social/health requirements. Our proposal is to provide a telephone support service to patients who may not have accessed services and sign-post to applicable support services where required; recording the provision offered for each of these patients.

Being in the unique position of having four GP directors and close working relationships with primary care and third sector services, we have the clinical input and expertise required; as well as the knowledge and capacity to improve the wellbeing for South Powys, during what has been, and will continue to be a difficult period on a global level. Working from within the GP practices or remotely, patients will be identified and contacted by telephone using identified, existing employees of the practices who can be offered additional hours; or by Red Kite employees who currently deploy services within the South Powys Practices. Working to a clinically endorsed protocol, the service will be fully evaluated and reported by Red Kite Health Solutions, using both quantitative and qualitative data collection over a 12-month period from December 2020.

Services will cover the practice populations of:

Brecon Medical Group Practice, Ty Henry Vaughan, Brecon, Powys LD3 8AH
Ystradgynlais Group Practice, Gorof Road, Ystradgynlais, Swansea, SA9 1DS
War Memorial Health Centre, Beaufort Street, Crickhowell, NP8 1AG
Haygarth Doctors, Forest Road, Hay-On-Wye, Hereford, HR3 5DS

Total patient population 46,320

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Considerations

- Capacity of staff due to the current issues with self-isolation and low practice numbers may limit speed of contact across different practices
- Practices may not wish to utilise Red Kite staff for extra capacity
- Ensure staff are educated to ensure patients do not view as a GP appointment offering service
- Red flags – Protocol to cover concerns over patients and appropriate pathways for urgent issues

Method

- Clinical system searches and creation of patient lists
- Identification of staff
- Creation of clinical IT templates in the practice systems for data capture (EMIS web)
- Creation of clinical IT system searches in the practice systems (EMIS web)
- Creation of a COVID-19 Support Service Directory
- Training schedule for telephonists
- Creation of telephonist protocol
- Check of IT and recording availability
- Creation of telephone/web directory
- 2 x Training sessions via Microsoft teams
- 2 x review training telephone calls
- 4x review clinics
- Telephone calls to patients
- Collation of data
- Production of evaluation report

Outcomes

During the period from November to December 2020, a large amount of administration time was spent contacting and collating all available social and health service contacts throughout South Powys and neighbouring areas and preparing documentation for telephonist training. Work included;

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- Meeting with Powys Teaching Health Board to discuss the scope of the project
- Meeting with the South Powys Cluster and practices to propose the project setup x 2
- Meeting with third sector and voluntary organisation e.g. PAVO/MIND to ensure linking up of the services and up to date information
- Meeting with the four cluster practices to discuss service provision and capability
- The collation and creation of a 'COVID Impact Support Directory' incorporating all contact numbers, email addresses and locations of services in and around South Powys and neighbouring areas
- Production of a telephonist protocol and clinical oversee
- Collation of the appropriate vulnerable/shielding group lists
- Creation of clinical template for data capture in the four practices
- Administration time setup for collation of data and reports
- Identification of available staff
- Set up of IT and telephones allocated
- 4 x training sessions with nominated staff through December and January 2021
- Start date implemented
- 1 practice able to start in December upon training completion.

From December 2020 to March 2022 a total of 146 sessions totalling **1896** telephone calls to vulnerable/shielding patients have been carried out by the Impact Service telephonists, resulting in **1460** successful contacts.

Total No. of calls made	1896
Total No. of successful contacts	1460
Percentage of Successful Contacts Made	77%

Of the **1460** patients successfully contacted;

96 patients were given advice
8 patients were referred to MIND
1 patient was signposted to other Mental Health charities
103 patients were signposted to GP practice/ health services

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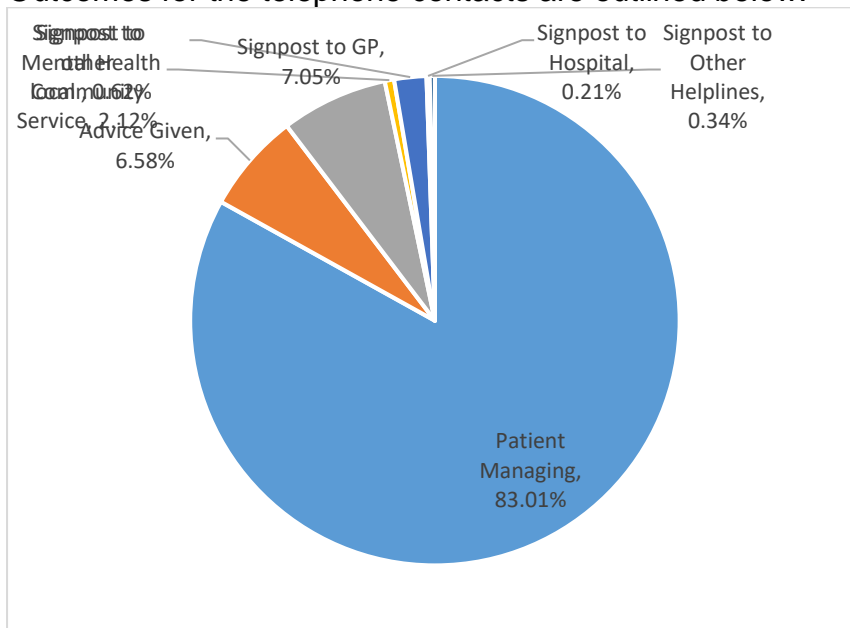
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6 patients were signposted to Community Pharmacy
1 patient was signposted to Community Transport
3 Patients were signposted to Secondary Care Admin
3 Patients were signposted to Community District Nurses
20 Patients were referred to other voluntary services
5 Patients signposted to other helplines (CAB etc.)
1212 Patients managing at home- Welfare check completed

Outcomes for the telephone contacts are outlined below:



NB: Referrals to community services have been grouped for ease

To date over 77% of calls made have resulted in a successful patient contact. Collectively 246 patients (16.85%) of patients contacted have been given advice or signposted to other appropriate services to address their needs. This includes 7.05% of patients referred to their GP practice and 2.33% of patients signposted to community services. In addition, 9 patients (0.62%) have been signposted to Mental Health Services. 437 patients (23.05%) of calls made to patients have been unsuccessful, resulting in no reply or the patient being unavailable during the core telephone times of 9-5pm.



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Discussion and Considerations

Our plans for a COVID-19 impact service to support the South Powys population during the global pandemic have been received very well by both staff and patients alike. Our aim was always to try to utilise employees already based in the practices where possible, due to their knowledge of the patient base and familiarity with speaking to patients on a regular basis. This has come with some capacity issues in light of the levels of sickness absence associated with COVID-19 and the impact on the practices during the start-up of the vaccination programme during January 2021. This meant that the service was slightly slower during the initial phases than anticipated. We looked to enable Red Kite staff to assist at this time, however, the practices preference was to allocate to their own staff where possible with agreement we would step in with assistance if the situation became untenable.

From February 2021, all four practices had assigned staff members to the COVID service and patient contacts increased. From July 2021, Red Kite have also been assisting the practices for 1 day per week with telephone clinics due to ongoing COVID-19 related staff absence.

Shielding in Wales ended on the 31/03/2021 and we found this an opportune time to contact patients as they prepared to re-enter society, or required further support to manage their daily lives. Many of the queries from patients have been in relation to COVID-19 vaccinations and it is hoped that the advice given to the patient has avoided some calls in to the practice relating to vaccine appointments and these patients have been given advice and/or signposted appropriately. As we now approach winter we will continue to maximise clinics to check upon the welfare of vulnerable patients and provide up to date information on applicable services

Patients have been extremely grateful of the contact made to them during this time. Recent feedback includes;

'I'm very well looked after by my family but appreciate your call'

'The call came at the right time, I have struggled with lockdown and didn't know who to contact'

'All ok at the moment but very useful to know for the future'

'It's good to know there are services out there. I will arrange for my tablets to be collected'

'Thank you so much for your call, it's so nice to talk to someone'

'I'm very grateful for them taking the time to talk to me. I haven't spoken to anyone in such a long time. I will make sure I contact the befriending service as I didn't know about it, thank you'

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In addition, staff carrying out the service were asked to complete feedback, which was overwhelmingly positive;

'Overall I have found the experience very rewarding. Being able to make someone's day just by listening to them or having a chat has felt really good. The majority of patients were extremely happy and grateful to get a call and really enjoyed having someone to speak to, so I think it really made a difference to some patients'

'I think the fact that patients were speaking to someone different was probably very helpful and some hadn't spoken to anyone for a long time. I think they enjoyed the chat and the fact that we could signpost them to help if needed. It has got more difficult to contact some patients as restrictions have lifted'

'One lady was really struggling. We managed to get her a GP appointment and she was referred to MIND which really helped her'

'It has been a rewarding experience to make contact with patients to see how they had been coping with the situation around the COVID pandemic. I found the majority of patients were appreciative of a telephone call and happy to share their experience and viewpoint. It was also good to be able to signpost patients to further help'

Another positive outcome from the introduction of the service has been our increased collaboration and working partnerships with third sector organisations such as MIND and PAVO. Third sector colleagues have been extremely supportive, providing information and training support for our telephonists and building links between our agency, third sector services and primary care.

Future Plans

As we enter the winter months, the service will focus upon continuing to contact patients and follow up. Telephonists will be prepped with advice regarding COVID-19 boosters and flu vaccinations, as well as the current COVID-19 government guidance so that patients are informed of arrangements and helpful contacts.

It is noted that 24% of patient calls have resulted in no contact during the office hours of our telephonists being 9-5pm. This is a consideration for out of hours contact; however, this would result in difficulties with clinical support availability and is therefore, not within the scope of the service at this time. As winter approaches, we will consider a letter drop to these patients if contact has not been successful after 3 separate occasions.

One other notable point to consider as we continue in to winter with the covid-19 service is the inclusion of other groups added to the shielding list after our initial projection plans. This includes more patients with chronic diseases such as diabetes and patients with a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above; increasing the potential number of patients who may require support. This has been monitored throughout

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the service evaluation and patient lists adapted accordingly. Interestingly, some of the practices have also highlighted an increased awareness of patients contacting them who may not be classed as clinically vulnerable due to their age or medical condition but are vulnerable, isolated and suffering from the impact of COVID-19; particularly due to anxiety and loneliness and we are able to support this by providing a follow-up call to these highlighted patients.

References

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/31july2020>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/related-health-issues>

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