

CASE STUDY:

HOW OUT-OF-AREA ADVICE & GUIDANCE IS SUPPORTING CLINICIANS IN DERBYSHIRE



Enhanced Advice & Guidance provided by Consultant Connect has been available to clinicians in Derby and Derbyshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) since 2016. The service, which is commissioned by the ICB, connects NHS healthcare professionals to specialists for rapid advice via telephone, photo and messaging to ensure patients are treated in the right place by the right person the first time.

We spoke with Dr Julia Mason, a GP in Derbyshire who uses the service, to find out how Enhanced Advice & Guidance (A&G) supports her and her colleagues in providing the best patient care. We also spoke with Dr Steve Cookson, the NHS consultant cardiologist, who responded to Dr Mason's A&G query.

Derbyshire stats*:

25 specialties for Telephone Advice & Guidance

4 specialties for Photo Messaging Advice & Guidance

83% first-time call connection rate

Calls are answered, on average, within 31 seconds

*Data correct from April to October 2023

What advice would you give to colleagues who are hesitant to use Enhanced A&G?

'It can feel quite isolating in general practice at times, therefore having secondary care expertise from different specialties that is so accessible has been very helpful in my practice. The responses have always been prompt and very informative; taking the individual patient situation into consideration. The clinicians are also very respectful in their responses and mindful of the limitations of primary care.'

Patient record integration is switched on for your area, which means that when you enter a valid NHS number and leave an outcome following the receipt of A&G, your Consultant Connect activity is automatically added to the patient's record. How does this help you in your everyday role?

'Before the integration feature was switched on, I would have to set reminders to look for the response and then copy and paste this into the patient records. This could be time consuming and, also, caused me worry in case I forgot to set this reminder. Now a copy of all correspondence within Consultant Connect is automatically integrated into the records which saves time and makes the information easily visible to other clinicians for future reference.'

Patient Example

Dr Julia Mason's perspective

'I had the results of an echocardiogram that haematology had asked us to request to investigate a patient's non-specific symptoms. The echocardiogram report mentioned some findings and whilst I didn't feel they would be the cause of the patient's symptoms, I was not sure of the clinical significance of these with regards to the need for a cardiology review or further investigation.'

'In Derbyshire, through Consultant Connect, we have access to the Cardiology ECG/Echo Messaging line, which is provided by out-of-area NHS consultants on the National Consultant Network (NCN). With the patient's consent, I sent a photo of their ECG and echocardiogram with clinical details and my query via the Consultant Connect App for advice. I received a response from Dr Steve Cookson, an NHS consultant cardiologist who provides advice on the NCN, the same day, which reassured no further action was needed from a cardiology perspective.'

Dr Julia Mason's perspective continued

Dr Cookson even went on to suggest the next possible steps for investigating the symptoms mentioned which is beyond what I was expecting.

'The process of getting this advice was quick and easy, saving an unnecessary referral and workload for local cardiology services. The patient was also very pleased to be contacted the same day with the outcome of this A&G request.'

Dr Steve Cookson's perspective

'Cardiology, by its nature, works really well as a Messaging A&G specialty. ECGs and echocardiograms are difficult to describe verbally and the ability to forward them alongside the patient's history enables us to give comprehensive advice quickly which is valuable to both the patient and the referring clinician.

'What I like about providing A&G via Consultant Connect is that if I am unable to take a call in the moment or answer a message, there are a rota of specialists who can. **And because of that, Primary Care clinicians never need to feel like they are interrupting us – we are here to help.**

'Some clinicians may feel apprehensive about speaking with a consultant who is not based at a local hospital. Although we cannot aid admissions, most hospitals operate very similarly and it's very rare that I speak with a clinician whom I cannot help in some way. **I would encourage all clinicians to use the NCN if they are given the opportunity. We all want the same thing: for patients to get fast solutions for problems.'**



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