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Managing referrals remotely while shielding during COVID-19

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As a gastroenterology locum registrar, I was covering clinical work at the Royal Oldham Hospital in Manchester when COVID-19 escalated to a global pandemic. Due to existing health conditions, I was advised to shield from other people – including patients – for my own safety. This meant that I was confined to a desk, isolating from colleagues, and unable to see patients face to face.

Bleepa had been introduced as a pilot in the hospital prior to coronavirus, then paused while the trust dealt with the early stage of the first wave, and restarted once it was identified that the app could support remote working, referral processes and the management of COVID-19 patient pathways.

To continue supporting the gastroenterology team, my responsibility was to review patient cases and make clinical decisions on referrals. Without the introduction of Bleepa, this would have been a nightmare to manage manually. It can be very difficult to get hold of doctors at the right time, you're dealing with a lot of chasing, paperwork and phone calls.



"With Bleepa you can see all the patient information remotely and don't need to physically see the patient to deal with the referral"

This made it much safer not only for me personally but also for patients and colleagues to minimise contact with others. With the wealth of information at my fingertips in Bleepa, I was able to offer my team more comprehensive support during shielding.

Bleepa was really easy to use, I was able to get up and running with hardly any training, just a quick conversation with a colleague who had already used it and the in-app help was enough.

When I log into Bleepa I can check my messages, see new referrals, manage patient cases and review any discharge information, meaning that I can handle all aspects of the referral in one go online.

It can take quite a long time for the patient management plan to be available digitally without Bleepa (hours, sometimes days) as it often needs to be typed up by the admin staff. At times it comes directly from the clinician who documents it in the patient's case notes. On occasion, the plan is delivered over the phone, but the problem is that there's then no documentation of it, which can become a patient safety and auditing issue. With Bleepa, patient referrals are fully documented and the whole process is much more efficient with faster clinical response times.

What is also a bonus for busy clinicians is that Bleepa works asynchronously, so they can view and respond to the referral when it's convenient for them, for example when they are on duty.

The rest of my colleagues have been really happy with my ability to respond to clinical enquiries and manage the patient referrals despite needing to shield.

I would really recommend Bleepa to other hospital trusts and clinical teams and I will thoroughly miss it when I go to work in other hospitals who don't have it!