

GP avoids referral for frail, elderly patient

Dr Jo Russell in Solihull, talks about her experiences of using Telephone Advice & Guidance.

Specialism mentioned:

Haematology

NHS

Solihull

Clinical Commissioning Group

NHS

Heart of England

NHS Foundation Trust

Monkspath Surgery

- Founded in 1985, the current surgery was built in 1987.
- Since 1995 the Surgery has taken on a significant role in medical student training.
- Nine GPs (two full-time, seven part-time) look after 12,000 patients in the local area.
- Dr Jo Russell, MBBS DCH MRCGP, has been a GP for 24 years. Her special interests include nursing homes and palliative care.



Monkspath Surgery, Solihull

Dr Russell looks after a cohort of frail, elderly patients in local nursing homes for Monkspath Surgery in Solihull. When Dr Russell felt specialist advice was needed, prior to the introduction of the Telephone Advice and Guidance (A&G) service, she would refer the patient to hospital.

“It’s difficult to put across the frailties of a patient in a letter that may not be read by a senior clinician.”

Having used the Telephone A&G service, commissioned by Solihull CCG, Dr Russell says it allows her to deliver more patient-centred care:

“My frail, elderly patients in nursing homes require a slightly different approach when deciding which investigations and treatments are appropriate. When considering the possibility of not sticking to an agreed and accepted protocol, it is safer to discuss the individual case with a colleague.”



“Referral of frail elderly patients to hospital is almost always complicated because of their co-morbidities and is sometimes not in the best interests of the patients. Telephone A&G gives me immediate access to a senior specialist colleague and an immediate outcome and plan. This is of huge benefit to these patients.”

Whilst most A&G is sought via the Telephone A&G service, Dr Russell occasionally uses email for *“less complex cases that can wait a week.”*

For GPs feeling unsure about whether to use Telephone A&G, Dr Russell has this advice:

“Give the service a try! The consultants have been lovely - really supportive. My concerns have been taken very seriously and my questions answered. I have never been made to feel that I have wasted their time.”

We asked Dr Russell to provide us with a recent clinical issue that prompted her to use Telephone A&G:

PATIENT 1



Elderly patient with abnormalities on her full blood count.

“A frail 85-year-old patient in a nursing home, with a past history of schizophrenia and dementia developed abnormalities on her full blood count. In a younger patient, I would have referred urgently via rapid access but, given the patient’s co-morbidities, I wanted to know what investigations would be considered and how invasive they might be.”

How Telephone A & G helped:

“The haematologist was able to log into the patient’s blood results there and then. He explained that the blood picture looked like Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia (CLL). He felt that a bone marrow biopsy would be the investigation of choice but that it might be too traumatic for the patient. We decided, after discussion around the patient’s current physical health, that investigations were not in her best interest.

The CLL was likely to be very slow to escalate and, since the patient had a very stable quality of life (she was attending activities within the nursing home and enjoying visits from her family), it was perfectly reasonable not to investigate further. This reassured me that I had really considered the pros and cons of whether to investigate or not.”

“The haematology specialist was so helpful. The referral was avoided and the patient has maintained her quality of life. It enabled me to be part of the decision-making process and this was important given the patients co-morbidities.”

If you are interested finding out more about Telephone A&G service, please email hello@consultantconnect.org.uk or call 01865 261 467