

5 minutes with... a frontline Consultant Emergency Physician

Dr Ron Cook is a frontline Consultant Emergency Physician and Clinical Care Group Director for Unscheduled Medicine at Ninewells Hospital in NHS Tayside, Dundee, Scotland.

Ninewells Hospital have been using Consultant Connect since 2018, so it made sense to include the service as part of their COVID-19 response strategy. Dr Cook talks to us about his personal experience of answering A&G calls through the service...

1 What were the reservations (by you or your team) of using Consultant Connect prior to the service being rolled out in 2018?

"We didn't have many reservations, NHS Tayside had been operating an emergency department prof-to-prof line for some time. Using Consultant Connect to support this offered the additional benefits of available data (regarding call volumes and sources) and the reassurance of call recording for governance and incident review reasons."

2 Have you found it easy to use?

"Yes - the call handling is seamless and the dashboard and call logs are intuitive and easy to navigate."

3 How has it helped your department?

"The ability to record the content of calls and access data (regarding call volumes and sources) has been a vital addition to our prof-to-prof service. Call records enable immediate 'listen back' which provides crucial clinical governance in reviewing decision making and also provides a valuable educational opportunity in training staff in remote clinical decision support. Logging call volumes enables accurate resource management and contributes to job planning."

4 Have you found your team's workload has been impacted by reviewing cases?

"NHS Tayside has always recognised the value of the prof-to-prof service in avoiding unnecessary presentations to Emergency Departments. This long held belief is supported by a review of call outcome data which reveals that in 30% of calls made by the ambulance service the patient receives self care advice or is directed to an alternative care setting to the ED."

5 How has it helped with your response to COVID-19? What changes have you needed to make?

"In Tayside we quickly recognised that we would need to deliver separate streams of assessment and admission for non COVID-19 and COVID-19 possible patients. This led to the rapid establishment of a dedicated COVID-19 Assessment Unit on our main hospital site and Consultant Connect were able at short notice to provide a COVID-19 Advice Line. This was a critical component of the COVID-19 stream, separate from our Emergency Department and non COVID-19 Acute Medicine Units.

The Consultant Connect line enables direct referrals from GPs and regional ambulance crews and thus has enabled safe assessment of COVID-19 possible presentations and assisted in enabling the ED to continue to provide 'traditional' Emergency Care. This was hugely beneficial in the early COVID-19 response, when teams across healthcare were working to familiarise themselves with COVID-19 presentations.

The Consultant Connect line facilitated access to expert advice and the ability to immediately listen back to calls provided a valuable training tool."

6 What do you see as the main benefits to patients?

"Timely availability of remote senior decision maker guidance to enable presentation to the most appropriate care setting for that patient's requirements, first time."