

How have essential pharmacy lead outpatient services been sustained throughout the COVID-19 pandemic?

A.R.Lindsley

Supervisor – Yasmina Ashour

Queen Elizabeth Hospital Pharmacy Department

Introduction

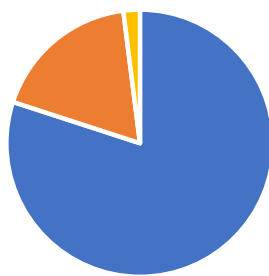
The COVID-19 pandemic has placed increasing stress on the services provided by the NHS and initially forced many services to cease to maintain patient safety and reduce transmission of virus. Of these, outpatient (OP) services were substantially reduced, with services running at 41% of the previous year's average in April 2020. ⁽¹⁾ However, the warfarin monitoring service and rheumatology prescribing service are two key OP services which could not be stopped due to the high-risk nature of the patients they monitor and provide for. ^(2,3) Regular monitoring of INRs in patients on warfarin is essential and is outlined in both NICE and the British Haematological society guidelines ⁽²⁾ for anticoagulation with over 1200 complex patients relying on the service for safe and optimal anticoagulation. The rheumatology prescribing service provides a safe and effective prescribing service to ensure patients receive appropriate DMARD and biological therapies in the community. Due to the high risk nature of both these patient groups, it was vital that the services continues and that the patients were protected to the best of our ability from the pandemic. This study therefore aims to identify the adaptations made to each service to enable them to continue providing a safe and high standard of care, and assess patient experience of the OP service during the pandemic.

Method

Patient satisfaction questionnaires were used to engage patients. Patients under the warfarin service were handed a 6-question survey at clinics, whilst rheumatology patients were consulted via telephone using a similar 6-question survey. Questions focussed on the perceived impact of COVID-19 on the services, the support provided, ease of communication and overall satisfaction.

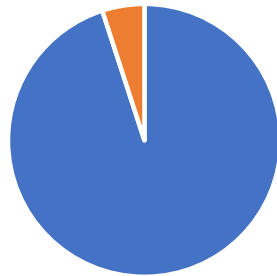
Overall, how satisfied have you been with the rheumatology prescription service?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied



Overall, how satisfied have you been with the warfarin service over the Covid-19 pandemic?

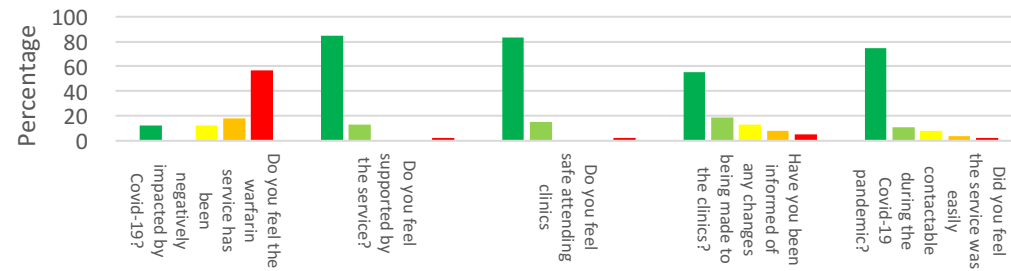
- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied



Results

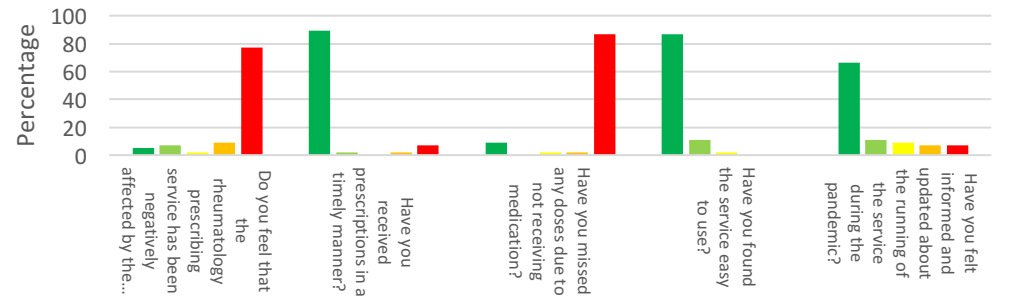
The warfarin service during COVID-19 - Patient satisfaction survey Results

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree



Rheumatology Prescribing service during COVID-19 - Patient satisfaction survey

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree



Conclusion

Of the 111 (67 warfarin and 44 rheumatology) patients across both services were contacted, 98% were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall delivery of the services over the pandemic. Of the 67 patients who attended regular appointments, 98.5% said they felt safe doing so with the measure put in place and a further 98.5% felt supported by the service during the pandemic. Each service adapted differently to the COVID-19 pandemic, with both managing to provide a patient centred approach which patients were satisfied with. The introduction of social distancing at warfarin clinics enabled vulnerable patients to attend safely. Shielding staff took upon the administrative running of the service, managing the home patient clinic, answering machine queries and clinical correspondences. The perceived negative impact on the warfarin service stems from the closure of certain GP sites and changing of clinics, meaning patients were transferred to alternative clinics which were less convenient to them. Due to the instruction to shield, clinically vulnerable rheumatology patients were offered a delivery service via the OP pharmacy, reducing their exposure to the hospital setting. Overall, patients are highly satisfied with the outpatient services provided throughout the pandemic, with the majority of patient's feeling that there has been no negative impact. The changes made for the safety of the staff and patients have allowed for the services to continue undisrupted.

1- The hidden impact of COVID-19 on patient care in the NHS in England. British Medical Association, July 2020 2-Keeling, et al (2011). Guidelines on oral anticoagulation with warfarin – fourth edition. British Journal of Haematology, 154: 311-324. 3- Ledingham J, et al on behalf of the BSR and BHRP Standards, Guidelines and Audit Working Group, BSR and BHRP guideline for the prescription and monitoring of non-biologic disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs, *Rheumatology*, Volume 56, Issue 6, June 2017, Pages 865–868