

Innovative diabetes project comes under the national spotlight

An innovative project which was introduced to make sure patients with diabetes could continue to receive high quality care during COVID-19 is being showcased nationally following its success at ESNEFT.

Colleagues at Ipswich Hospital's Diabetes Centre developed a postal haemoglobin (HbA1c) testing kit at the start of the first lockdown so that they could safely and accurately monitor their patients' glycaemic control without them needing to come onto site.

The project has proved such a success that it will continue after the pandemic to help reduce footfall at our hospitals while also improving convenience for patients.

In addition, it was recently commended by judges in the Patient Care Pathway category of the Quality in Care (QiC) Awards 2021. Thanks to funding from Colchester & Ipswich Hospitals Charity, the research which shaped the initiative is also being published in the British Medical Journal so that other trusts can follow ESNEFT's lead and introduce similar schemes.

Prof Gerry Rayman, Consultant in Diabetes and Endocrinology, led the development of the home testing kits, together with Jenna Cross, laboratory technician, who undertook the laboratory evaluations. He said: "Our team is incredibly proud of this initiative, which is revolutionising the service we provide to our patients while also strengthening ESNEFT's position as a national leader in diabetes care.

"We usually test for HbA1c when our patients come into clinic, but this simply wasn't possible during the height of the pandemic when we moved to virtual clinics and while many people with diabetes were shielding because of their condition. We worked quickly to source specialist blood tubes and develop a remote kit which would not only be reliable, accurate and easy to use, but would also remain stable when sent through the post.

"Since then, we have sent out well over 1,000 kits and had a return rate of more than 80%, which is really encouraging.

"This has been a really effective way of delivering care during COVID-19 and has been well-received by our patients. We were delighted to be commended in the QiC awards and incredibly grateful to the charity for their support in helping to publicise this important step forwards in diabetes care. We hope that other trusts will follow our lead and introduce similar initiatives for the benefit of their patients."

In the future, patients whose condition is stable will continue to benefit from using the remote testing kits as they will be offered one virtual and one face-to-face appointment each year.

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