

Introduction of Teledermatology Triage for Skin Cancer Referrals

Dr J Halpern, Dr A Wernham, Mr H Soulsby on behalf of the joint WHT and RWT Dermatology Service & The Black Country Provider Collaborative



Quality Improvement Awards 2024

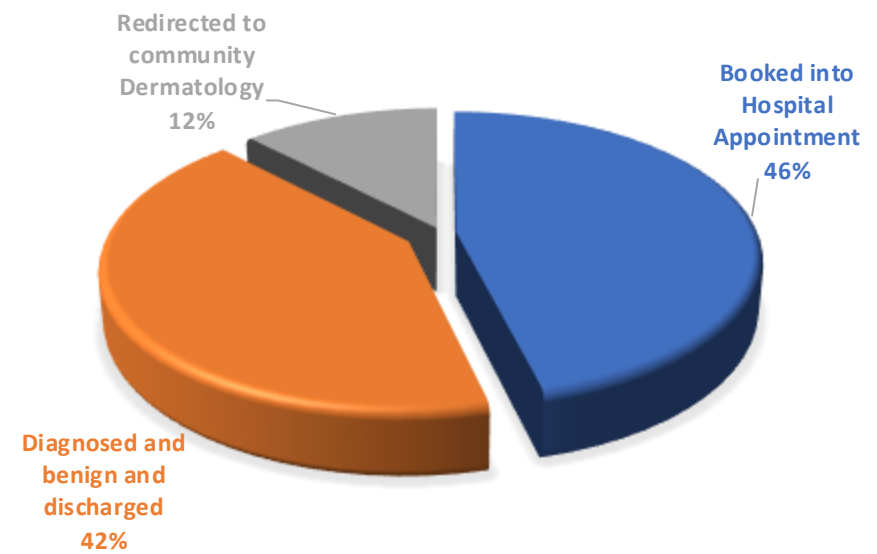
Fast track urgent referrals for suspected skin cancer are sent to the joint WHT/RWT Dermatology department. In the traditional pathway all patients referred on the fast-track pathway are seen face to face in the hospital by a member of the consultant led team. Referrals through this pathway have been increasing by 11% year on year, creating a huge challenge in providing enough appointments.

Teledermatology was therefore introduced to reduce demand for clinic appointments. In this model, once a fast-track referral has been received, the patient is directed to a community photography hub. Specialist dermoscopic photographs of the skin lesion are taken and sent for analysis by a consultant through a secure platform. If the lesion is diagnosed as benign, the patient is informed of the result by telephone and discharged. If the lesion is concerning, they are brought to clinic for a face-to-face appointment.

After an initial trial period, the service was expanded to all suitable fast-track referrals sent to WHT and RWT trusts in April 2024. To date 900 patients have been through this pathway. Only 415 (46%) have required a face-to-face appointment, with 375 (42%) of patients being discharged back to their GP with a benign diagnosis and 110 (12%) being redirected to community dermatology providers with non-cancer lesions. We have been able maintain rapid assessment of cases with 85% of cases being returned within 24hrs and most cases being undertaken the same day (71% at RWT, 63% at WHT).

The costs and resource required to deliver this service is sustainable with an overhead of £20 per case for the photography hub. Delivering the Teledermatology service has taken the equivalent of two consultant clinics worth of time per week, with an equivalent reduction of 10 consultant clinics per week in patients who have not needed to be seen.

There are plans to now roll-out Teledermatology triage for all Dermatology referrals (e.g. rashes), expansion of photography hubs and the use of trained medical photographers to increase the quality of photographs.



Advantages for Patients

- Rapid diagnosis of benign lesions, results within 24hrs for 85%
- Shorter waiting times for those with skin cancer
- Diagnosis in the community, close to home
- Reduced time off work to attend the hospital
- Reduced carbon footprint



Teledermatology

The introduction of Teledermatology triage has reduced the need for face-to-face suspected skin cancer appointments by 54% and reduced waiting times for appointments.

Working in partnership

The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust
Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust