

Oncology Clinical Nurse Specialist Versatility : ensuring a safer, continued day oncology environment throughout COVID



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Background:

The COVID pandemic has forced organisations to adapt to restrict the transmission of the virus, while ensuring oncology services continue to function. Oncology Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS) have been forefront in these efforts, ensuring coordination and administration of complex care . Nursing / Midwifery National Planning & Development Unit (NMPDU) funding was awarded in 2019 for a “task versatile” (tv) CNS to focus on non ED direct access to a CNS. The key areas of this analysis were telephone triage and the ability of the tvCNS COVID screening pre-SACT visits to maintain a safe environment.

Methods:

- 1) Changes in primary roles of individual oncology CNS posts were recorded from 1/20 to 12/20
- 2) Data on the activity of the varied adaptive roles of the CNS were captures from the hospital information systems.
- 3) All patients attending for SACT were contacted 24 hours prior to their planned visit to screen for COVID 19 symptoms.
- 4) On arrival for SACT patients were screened again prior to being allowed into the Oncology Day Ward.
- 5) Those with concerning symptoms were referred for COVID 19 testing
- 6) Activity numbers were recorded by the tvCNS

Results:

Nurse-lead telephone triage (NLTT) was assessed between 1/20 and 12/20. From the COVID 19 outbreak in 3/20 the tvCNS moved from NLTT to COVID screening / risk reduction.

In 1/21 a new CNS was appointed to continue NLTT.

- 1,837 telephone calls received between 1/20 and 12/20.
 - 93% were managed by tvCNS
 - 121 cases advised to attend ED
 - 1,304 patients made 11,606 attendances to the Oncology Day Ward for treatment
- Between 03/20 and 12/20 COVID pre-screening was performed on 10,417 patient visits.
- 133 patients required a COVID 19 swab in view of symptoms.
 - No Day Oncology linked outbreaks of COVID 19 occurred.

Conclusions:

The COVID 19 pandemic has demonstrated how essential versatility is in the efforts to manage the ever changing scenarios faced during the peaks and troughs of COVID outbreaks.

The broad skill mix within specialist oncology nursing were key to these adaptations and allowed the continued delivery of essential SACTs.