

WELCOME

to this weeks guest blog from Tony McDonald

I've jumped into the guest blogging seat this week to share some brilliant news – the Trust and it's partners in Pennine Lancashire have been shortlisted in the Health Service Journal's Patient Safety Awards!

We are absolutely delighted to be competing with some equally great projects in the Best Use of Integrated Care and Partnership Working category, in an entry submitted by colleagues who have been working together as part of the innovative virtual Covid ward initiative.



The entry, submitted by the area's Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) represents the contribution of everyone here at East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust, working with Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust, East Lancashire Medical Services, Pennine Lancashire Primary Care General Practices, Pennine Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Groups and the Council for Voluntary Services.

Now, we all know Pennine Lancashire people are feisty and determined – and so it goes without saying that we'd love to win. But I want to share with you why this initiative is already a winner for local people, our patients and their families.

It has saved lives, provided care and reassurance to people and ensured hospital services have been protected for those that needed them most. Just the most incredible achievement.

Let me explain more.

During the COVID pandemic we created a virtual ward for people at low or moderate risk from Covid where they were monitored and supported by clinicians in their own home.

You will know, sadly, East Lancashire faced some of the highest community infection rates in the UK with subsequent hospital admissions also very high indeed. At the peak, we had almost 350 very poorly Covid positive people on our wards, in critical and enhanced care, needing treatment and support. It is well documented that we have lost a great many people from our communities during the pandemic, including our own staff which was and continues to be very tough indeed.

It is true to say though that the virtual Covid ward provided support and first class care to many people, helping them remain at home or be discharged from hospital as soon as possible. It still does and remains an important part of our ongoing response to the pandemic.

Our ambition as a wider team when we started it was to prevent as many people as possible from being admitted to hospital and reduce the number of people who died from the virus.

And put simply that's exactly what the virtual Covid ward did. It helped people with the virus to stay at home and recover, safe and reassured through close support and monitoring by clinicians.

The results are really impressive and are being considered nationally as a new approach to healthcare. The virtual ward improved outcomes and reduced mortality but hospital stays were also reduced.



But what seems most important and has the greatest impact for me is the feedback from patients about how they felt after being part of this new approach. The virtual ward clearly made a real difference to people's lives and to the Pennine Lancashire health system with 1,710 patients recovering safe at home, in their own surroundings, with family and carers.

I have read the patient feedback too and I am extremely proud that 95 per cent of people cared for through the virtual ward were satisfied. When you read the free text comments, there are many that stand out, including:

- The nurses rang every day to talk me through each step of the infection
- The support has been outstanding
- I have only praise for the work they have done, excellent service, couldn't find fault for anything
- All the staff were fantastic and always there to help every day
- A very good idea
- The nurses involved in the service were really good, they were really helpful. Being able to be monitored at home gave me comfort
- I received excellent support which made me feel safer than being on my own
- Great staff, a very caring team who helped ease my anxiety

And one that really touched me: **“At my darkest hour they were there. I couldn't thank them enough. I felt reassured. An outstanding support and service. Thankyou.”**

I suspect I speak for all those involved when I say that, win or lose in the award category, comments like that are the reason we come to work and do what we do, even in the face of a pandemic that has left us worn out and at times feeling hopeless.

I do hope the team wins, but I couldn't be any prouder of this initiative and as we continue to fight against Covid in our community and hospital settings, I am pleased we are doing it together to such great effect.

There have been a great many people who have worked hard to develop an initial idea into the successful virtual ward we have in place today. I don't want to mention individuals in what is clearly a team effort across so many organisations, but we are grateful to each and every person who has contributed.

Take care – and get your vaccine if you haven't already.

Tony