A VIRTUAL CLINIC SERVICE FOR THE REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING INVESTIGATIONS REQUESTED BY AN ACUTE MEDICAL UNIT
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What is virtual clinic?

The Virtual Clinic (VC) was introduced by St George’s Acute Medical Unit (AMU) to ensure that the results of outstanding investigations are reviewed and acted upon appropriately after patients are discharged. Referrals are made to the VC co-ordinator who forwards investigation results once done. Registrars then review these (with consultant support) and write to General Practitioners (GPs) with a suggested plan of action. We set out to evaluate the service we provide with the aim of improving and expanding service provision.

Methods

A retrospective analysis of all referrals to VC over a six month period (01/07/2012 to 31/12/2012). Referral data was collected from the clinic database and any further information was manually extracted from the electronic patient notes.

Example case

65 year old gentleman presented with 3 weeks of shortness of breath, cough and fever with raised inflammatory markers. Treated with 2 days of IV antibiotics and discharged to complete a 5 day course of oral antibiotics. Arranged for a follow up repeat X-ray in 6 weeks. Repeat X-ray was reviewed in VC and showed no resolution. The patient returned to clinic and was still symptomatic, therefore a CT chest and abdomen was performed. CT showed - multiple nodular deposits in the right lung, mediastinal lymphadenopathy and extensive left sided consolidation. The patient underwent a bronchoscopy and biopsies confirmed an adenocarcinoma of the lung.

Results

Demographic of referrals

705 investigations were submitted to the VC and reviewed (3.8 per day). This was for 499 patients (7 were referred twice). Mean age of referrals was 64 years (range 17-98). The percentage female was 57%.

Completion rates

82% of all investigations were completed. There was no relationship between age or sex and completion.

Performance and review of investigations

Re-requests

The VC allowed for 111 investigations to be re-requested. 65.8% of these re-requests were successful. Of the 129 investigations not done, 30 had been re-requested (23%)

Outcomes

• New brain metastases on a bone scan of a 65 year old woman with previous breast cancer
• Transitional cell carcinoma of the bladder confirmed from a urine sample of a 89 year woman with a bladder lesion
• Protein S deficiency found in a 44 year old with multiple pulmonary embolisms
• Gastric cancer diagnosed on OGD in a 81 year old with epigastric pain and vomiting
• Severe aortic stenosis on ECHO in a 90 year old with dizziness and a murmur
• Lung cancer on CT of a 82 year old lady with COPD and an abnormal chest x-ray

Summary

VC has a high completion rate for outstanding investigations and it ensures that results are reviewed and acted upon. It has also identified areas for service improvement, particularly the time from an investigation being performed to the VC letter and the specificity of the advice being provided. Steps have been taken to improve the service and we are planning on re-auditing the service.