

Cancer Care Congress 2011

Improving Skin Cancer Diagnosis in Primary Care A Dermatology Service Redesign

The Skin Cancer Problem

Within Eastern and Coastal Kent PCT, GP dermatology referrals to secondary care increased 17% annually for the past 5 years – resulting in an overspend of £1.7m in 2010.

An audit confirmed that 50% of those referrals were of pigmented lesions and moles where the GP could not rule out skin cancer. 90% of those referrals were unnecessary as the patients could have been discharged or treated in the community. Published evidence also suggested that GPs found the diagnosis of melanoma particularly challenging – with 1 in 3 melanomas initially misdiagnosed in primary care¹.

The Dermoscopy Solution

The PCT recognised that setting up Consultant-led community based clinics would only serve to move the geographical location of Dermatology and would not tackle the problem of unnecessary referrals and associated costs.

Clearly, an effective solution had to offer GPs additional support to enable them to achieve high quality diagnosis for skin cancer in line with NICE Referral Guidelines.

We were also aware that NICE Improving Outcomes Guidance recommended dermoscopy for melanoma diagnosis, provided it was used by experts, and published evidence suggested that tele-dermoscopy was a safe and cost effective model for primary care²³.

We therefore decided to provide our 400 GPs with a community based service which offered tele-dermoscopic diagnosis of pigmented lesions and moles by experts.

TELEDerm®

The PCT commissioned The MOLE Clinic™, an independent skin cancer diagnostic clinic based in London, to provide a tele-dermoscopy service to support its GPs. The MOLE Clinic™ is the only CQC registered provider of tele-dermoscopy in the UK and winner of the Patient Safety Award 2010 for its TELEDerm® service⁴.

¹ Journal of Foot and Ankle Research 2008, 1:11

² British Journal of Dermatology 2010 162, pg 803

³ Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare 2010_Volume 16 Number 4

⁴ www.themoleclinic.co.uk

GPs selected 4 practices to host the service and The MOLE Clinic™ trained nurses working in each practice to provide the service locally. Since May 2011, GPs have referred patients with pigmented lesions and moles to their local 'NHS TELEDerm® Clinic', where the nurses take and upload dermoscopic images and patient details to The MOLE Clinic's secure, web based Electronic Patient Record. The MOLE Clinic's expert doctors assess the data and send Diagnostic Reports to the referring GP within 3 days.



Results

Following the launch of the TELEDerm® Clinics, our GPs have successfully reduced unnecessary referrals to hospital by 75%, resulting in significant cost savings for the PCT and a reduction in waiting times for dermatology from 13 weeks to 6 weeks. In addition, 13% of lesions have been correctly diagnosed as being suspect for skin cancer which would have been missed without TELEDerm®.

The TELEDerm® service has proved very popular with GPs. In addition to increasing the quality of melanoma diagnosis in primary care, it has also helped increase GP skills and confidence levels.

Having successfully embedded TELEDerm® into the community, the PCT has now completed a redesign of dermatology services in line with the White Paper - ensuring that only patients who need to be referred to hospital are referred to hospital and bringing high quality care closer to home.

Sue Luff

Lead Commissioner, Dermatology, General Surgery and C&B

NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent

Templar House

Tannery Lane

Ashford

TN23 1PL

Tel: 01233 658478 Email: s.luff@nhs.net