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Evaluating the feasibility and safety of the HaNC-RC v2 2019 symptom-based calculator in streamlining suspected head and neck cancer referrals

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Background: Urgent suspected cancer referrals (USCR) to the ENT department at Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (CUHFT) are rising. This places a high demand on clinical services and results in extended waiting times for patients. The majority of referrals prove to be benign, yet all require timely triage to avoid diagnostic delays. Between January to May 2025, ENT services at CUHFT experienced a 38% increase in USCR compared to the same period in 2024. Despite polling at 21 days for first appointments, the service continued to receive appointment slot issues (ASIs), indicating capacity strain.

AIMS and OBJECTIVES: To streamline patients on the USCR pathway into the most appropriate clinic to be seen within the most appropriate time frame.

METHODS: On 14 July 2025, a 10 week pilot for a tele-triage clinic was launched. All patients on the USCR pathway without a neck lump were booked into this clinic delivered by two Band 7 Head and Neck cancer trained Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS). A validated symptom based risk calculator for head and neck cancer (HaNC-RC v2 (2019) was used to interrogate patient symptoms. A score was determined at the end of the consultation and patients allocated to in-person physician led clinics according to priorities P2, P3 and P4.

RESULTS: Patient waiting time was brought down to below 14 days from time of GP referral to first appointment.

CONCLUSION: The use of the HaNC-RC v.2 calculator in a tele-triage nurse led clinic has a significant potential in both reducing cancer diagnostic waiting times for patients on the USCR pathway and in risk stratifying patients into appropriate clinics within appropriate time frames.

Recent Publications

1. Mavinkurve A. 346 Evaluating the success rates of radiologically inserted gastrostomy, gastrojejunostomy and jejunostomies in paediatric patients at St. George's Hospital. BMJ Paediatrics Open. 2021;5:. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjpo-2021-RCPCH.188>
2. Baker, Q.F., & Addis, P.J. (Eds.). (2022). Anatomy: Regional, Surgical, and Applied (1st ed.). CRC Press. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003312895>
3. Mavinkurve, Aditya, Patel, Mahul, Shabana, Amanda and Das, Teesta. "Comparing global trends in gastric cancer and the need for national screening programs: An in-depth literature review" Open Health, vol. 5, no. 1, 2024, pp. 20230035. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ohe-2023-0035>

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Biography

Aditya Mavinkurve completed his medical training at St. Georges' University of London. He is currently fulfilling his role as a Clinical Research Fellow in ENT at Cambridge University Hospital.

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