

Matt Johnson

Helping stable IBD patients stay that way is something of a challenge, but one centre is using technology to tackle the problem – and saving tens of thousands of pounds in the process.

Luton and Dunstable University Hospital's gastroenterology department has developed an online self-management system, aimed at supporting patients, and nipping any potential problems in the bud.

IBD-SSHAMP (Supported, Self-Help and Management Programme) cuts down on unnecessary clinic appointments, saving the trust between £90k and £100k a year: a figure the team have included in a business plan to successfully bid for an additional full-time IBD nurse.

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Consultant Gastroenterologist at the hospital, Dr Matt W Johnson, said: “When our patients are well, they don't need to take a day off work and come to the hospital to tell us that. What they need is quick access to us when they are not feeling so good. “IBD-SSHAMP allows us to keep track of our patients from a distance, without having to drag them in to hospital.”

IBD patients, he said, often had problems accessing the team when they needed them.

“IBD-SSHAMP allows us to transfer stable patients to a community based self-management service, while still keeping a specialist overview, and direct contact and communication access when needed,” explained Matt. “Through the webpage, we are able to prompt patients about their medication, offer advice and remind people we are still here for them.”

Each patient who agrees to take part in the scheme is assigned a personal website, the first



page of which is a disease activity score that asks them to record symptoms and severity via a tick box system. This information is then transferred to the hospital, where it is converted to a traffic light warning system.

“If the symptom score is worrying,” said Dr Johnson, “this creates an alert and the nurses can contact the patient directly, to see if they can nip any problems in the bud before the condition flares up,” said Matt.

Uptake has been impressive, with 169 of 200 patients invited to take part in the first month doing so. The team hope to transfer 800 of their 2,840 IBD patients by the end of the year, relieving some pressure on the outpatient system and providing a substantial cost saving for the CCG.

Matt said: “We are offering this service to all patients: we know it will not suit everybody, but those who are using it have reported they like the system and the easy access to nursing support.”

“Patients will be reminded to access the site and input their details twice a year, and this will be interspersed with virtual telephone clinics to touch base with patients.”

The system tracks each person's disease scores, and presents them to the patient in graphical form, so they can see how the symptoms have changed over time, and Matt said this was particularly useful if a new therapy is added, or changes made to medications.