

Innovative digital app fast-tracked to help MND patients during COVID-19 pandemic

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A new online system, developed by the University of Sheffield, which enables healthcare professionals to remotely monitor and support patients who have motor neurone disease (MND) during the COVID-19 pandemic, has been fast-tracked for use by Sheffield Teaching Hospitals.

The Telehealth in Motor Neurone Disease (TiM) system) has been rolled out to patients with MND in Sheffield and Edinburgh months ahead of schedule; thanks to a partnership between the University of Sheffield's Institute for Translational Research (SITraN), Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and [technology firm](#) Advanced Digital Innovation (UK) Limited (ADI) a leader in the field of technology-enabled health and care services, which has been working with Sheffield Teaching Hospitals for the past four years, across its musculoskeletal services.

West Yorkshire-based ADI pioneered this technology in conjunction with the team in Sheffield, ensuring that its design has been driven by patient and carer feedback. It allows patients to seamlessly and securely connect with their healthcare provider through a web browser, or [mobile app](#), without the need for a physical visit.

Motor neurone disease is an extremely debilitating condition which progressively damages parts of the nervous system, causing muscles to waste and weaken.

Dr. Esther Hobson, Honorary senior lecturer at SITraN and Consultant Neurologist at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, said: "Motor neurone disease causes significant life-limiting problems and we had already recognized that it was not ideal to ask patients to travel long distances for routine check-ups.

"However, COVID-19 made it critical that we took extra steps to protect

these very vulnerable patients away from a hospital setting whilst continuing to manage their highly specialized care, and we have worked hard over the last few weeks to ensure the program was ready to launch months earlier than planned.

"Feedback so far has been extremely positive, with our patients telling us how grateful they were that we have rolled out the digital technology to care for them while keeping them safe."

Through the app patients answer a series of questionnaires on a weekly basis about their health. This gives their clinician real time data on how their patients are progressing. Through the app, patients can also get advice and help on how to manage their condition, attend virtual appointments with their consultant and even access troubleshooting advice for the medical equipment they have to help manage their symptoms at home.

Chris McDermott, Consultant Neurologist at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals and Professor of Translational Neurology at the University of Sheffield, said: "This allows us to provide the right level of specialist care remotely, especially for the most vulnerable patients for who traveling the sometimes lengthy distances for their appointments at specialist centers, could negatively affect their health.

"While COVID-19 has accelerated this change, it is providing clear and complementary benefits to patients who live far from a specialist center, and who want the new approach to be provided for the long term, beyond the pandemic."

John Eaglesham, ADI (UK) Ltd Chief Executive said: "COVID-19 has driven the need for pioneers in the NHS to trial new ways of communicating and caring for patients, particularly amongst at risk groups. Whilst this shift has been accelerated by the current pandemic, it

could herald a long term change in how the NHS interacts with patients, catching up to the online communications used in other sectors.

"These changes will not only keep at-risk patients safe, but could also help to better manage the next major challenge on the NHS. We're delighted that our technology is offering a game-changing solution and we are looking forward to continued success."

Craig Stockton, Chief Executive of charity MND Scotland, the lead funder of the project said: "I want to thank all of the MND Scotland supporters who have raised the vital funds needed to support this research, which will make a real difference to those living with MND and ensuring people with MND continue to receive the highest quality of care."

Provided by University of Sheffield

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