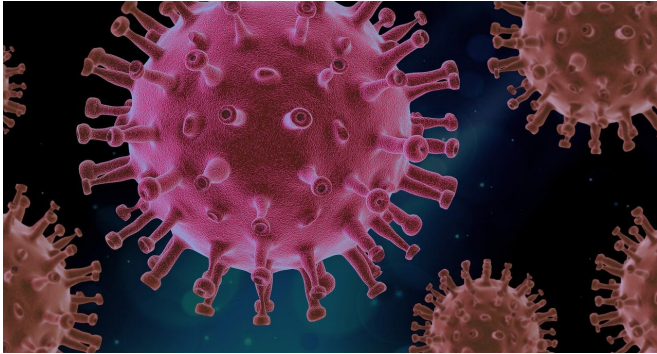


Coronavirus brings dawn of digital healthcare

14 April 2020



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In light of the highly-infectious Coronavirus pandemic, healthcare systems across the world have had to adapt rapidly for the evolving situation for three reasons:

1. The need to triage and treat large number of patients with respiratory problems
2. The need to protect [healthcare workers](#) to ensure they can treat the sick
3. The need to protect the elderly and most vulnerable in society from being infected

In the editorial, "Covid-19: A new digital dawn?," published in the journal *Digital Health* (SAGE Publications), researchers from our Institute of Digital Healthcare at WMG, University of Warwick (together with colleagues from Warwick Medical School, University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire NHS Trust and Bristol Heart Institute, United Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust) provide insight into how these three reasons have led to an increase in digital [healthcare](#).

Professor Theodoros Arvanitis, from the Institute of Digital Healthcare at WMG, University of Warwick comments:

"Covid-19 will unfortunately have a human cost that will be remembered for many years to come. Its impact on healthcare, the economy and society, as a whole, will be rather significant. However, it could also be the start of more digitised healthcare, as new ways of remote and digital health working have had to evolve so rapidly. We can learn from this time and take it further to make one positive come out of coronavirus, a more digital healthcare practice.

"A more digital healthcare practice could help slow further spreads of infections, as if you have an infection and go to the doctors, you could pass it to people in the waiting area. It can also help GPs communicate more quickly and internationally, sharing advice more freely in the future.

"It can also improve the economy of the healthcare system by managing better the clinical load of frontline staff, while provide flexibility in the way citizens access healthcare services."

Innovative digital healthcare responses come into various aspects of [coronavirus](#), from communication, to education and patient management.

In terms of communication, clinical groups are using messaging services such as slack and WhatsApp to manage rotas as high levels of staff may be off sick or in self-isolation. They are also using [social media](#), such as Facebook to make groups such as the 'COVID Doctors Forum (UK)', which on the 6th April 2020 had 14,813 members.

The group covers a range of topics, from PPE to procedures of self-isolation and lessons from colleagues internationally, as well as a number of blog posts.

There's also been further examples in change of communication as the Discourse Digital Health Network had a page with multiple threads

considering the digital response to Covid-19, as well as a webinar on the response, hosted by NHSX, which would have previously been face to face.

Education wise many conference, [training courses](#), post-graduate exams have been cancelled, however the need for rapid education of the healthcare workforce to deal with respiratory problems and deployment education to staff who have changed roles during the pandemic is still needed. It has therefore been carried out virtually.

Doctors in training have had their Annual Review of Clinical Progression assessments virtually, e-learning packages have also been set up much more rapidly than previously. For example, University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire produced a training package in just 72 hours to help staff train to deal with viral respiratory diseases.

One of the most significant changes is to patient management, in order to protect the elderly and vulnerable telemedicine consultations have taken place rather than in person.

There's also been a rapid reaction in the MedTech industry to roll out digital tools and packages, such as EMIS, (Egton Medical Information Systems), the largest supplier of electronic health records, introducing a range of interventions, including modifying coding, alert tracking and all EMIS web GPs in the UK being able to host vide consultations for free.

Most GP practices are now offering appointments over the phone, video call or via an app.

More information: Tim Robbins et al. COVID-19: A new digital dawn?, *Digital Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/2055207620920083](https://doi.org/10.1177/2055207620920083)

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