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Developing a video information resource to inform and reassure patients through the COVID-19 pandemic

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Introduction & Objectives: One of the biggest challenges of the last 12 months has been the practical continuation of cancer diagnostic services and changes in health-seeking behaviour, with urgent 2-week-wait cancer referrals decreasing by up to 80% in response to physical distancing and concerns about contracting SARS-CoV-2. Our diagnostic service saw a 60% decrease in referrals and an appointment cancellation rate of 50% in the first 4 weeks following national lockdown. In an effort to address these concerns we sought to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of a digital solution in the form of a patient video and an information leaflet to reassure patients about their hospital attendance.

Materials & Methods: We identified and recruited patients that had previously undergone prostate cancer diagnostics through the Prostate Rapid Diagnostic Clinic. Using an interview guide, an experienced facilitator conducted two 90-minute focus groups. Sessions were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using thematic content analysis techniques. A 3 minute patient video was developed based on the themes highlighted in the focus groups. A link to the video was emailed to patients alongside a Patient Information Sheet (PIS) prior to their appointment. The impact of the intervention was evaluated using a survey developed through a clinician and patient discussion group. A 7 point likert scale of agreement (1 strongly disagree – 7 strongly agree) was used to evaluate patient attitude to the interventions and was presented to participants in block-randomisation format. The survey was administered through the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR - 2018) compliant smart survey website.

Results: Focus Groups: Key themes emerging from the initial focus groups included; investigations required for diagnosis, timeline to diagnosis and Covid safe communication and consultations.

Survey Results: Between May 4th and June 6th, 43/61 consecutive patients seen in the diagnostic clinic were invited to complete the survey. The mean age of patients was 66 years. 53/61 [87%] of patients agreed or strongly agreed that understanding the safety precautions that had been implemented in the diagnostic pathway were reassuring. 54/61 [89%] of patients agreed or strongly agreed that understanding the investigations that would be carried out during their consultation and the timeline to a diagnosis was reassuring. 42/61 [69%] of patients agreed or strongly agreed that the video had made them feel safer to come to the diagnostic centre. Whereas only 19/61 [31%] felt the same way about the PIS. With 48/61 [79%] of patients preferring the video to the PIS.

Conclusions: Digital information was effectively used to deliver important messages through the peaks and troughs of the COVID-19 pandemic, and should be considered to reassure during any future pandemic waves.