The Virtual Reality of smoking and Covid19: Experience of reorienting services at SVUH during the Global Pandemic 2020-21 in the Republic of Ireland

Background

• The Global pandemic has necessitated a major public health response
• COVID-19 was first formally reported in Wuhan, China at the end of 2019
• Its impact on older people and medically complex or vulnerable patients was high
• Healthcare workers were a high risk group across the world
• Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures have evolved over time
Background

• In congregated, high-risk settings such as hospitals, essential frontline services were maintained but many patient services were initially deferred or moved online

• To minimise contagion, staff reduced non-essential ward working and out-patient services were curtailed

• There is concern this might create unmet need and health promotion services particularly are important
Smoking and COVID-19

- Smoking prevalence in Ireland is 17%
- Smoking is a major risk factor for adverse outcomes in severe COVID-19
- Arguably therefore smoking cessation and in-patient management should be sustained, if not prioritised

- The proportion that are daily smokers has declined from 19% to 14% since the first wave of this survey in 2015.
- Smoking rates remain highest among those aged 25 to 34. 26% of this age group are smokers, although this has declined from 32% in 2015.
- Smoking rates are higher in more deprived areas (24%) than in more affluent areas (14%).
- Smoking rates are also higher for those who are unemployed (40%) and those with no third level education (20%), than they are for those in employment (18%) and those with degree level education (11%).
- 19% of parents of children aged under 18 are smokers. 21% of fathers and 17% of mothers are smokers.
Results

• SVUH, an award-winning hospital, has a longstanding Smoking Advice Service and in Ireland to ban smoking outright in 2007
• A comprehensive Smoking Advice Service was reoriented to sustain accessibility for patients and staff
• There are both in-patient and out-patient services, staff supports and a group six-week stop smoking course
• All include follow-up evaluation and pilots were documented
• Accompanying presentation covers the online stop smoking course in more detail
Results

• In the first wave, services were limited and staff redeployed including to contact tracing services

• However, by the second and third waves services had been re-configured. Staff continued to take ward referrals but followed up patients by telephone rather than in-person

• T-Pro, a secure online video consultation system, was piloted for acceptability

• The group programme was delivered virtually online by facilitators

• Patients participated well in all services. The profile of those in the online group was more likely to be middle-aged and female
The vaccination rollout has been a game changer

SVUH established its own in-house vaccination programmes from early January and supported high risk community settings such as long stay facilities

In Ireland the National vaccination programme has now had over 90% uptake in adults

Breakthrough infections have a small but significant impact, though severe disease and hospitalisation reduced
Lessons on Virtual Working

• The new normal will likely include more distance delivery which is efficient as well as potentially effective

• All staff meetings were conducted virtually and highly successfully

• The dynamic of 1:1 and group interaction is different online but good outcomes are still achievable
Impact on Healthcare Education

• SVUH is a major teaching hospital of University College Dublin
• At any one time there are approximately 1000 health sciences students on placement
• During the pandemic final year Medicine graduation was expedited and nursing students were offered frontline remunerated posts
• Master of Public Health student graduates engaged in contact tracing
• In 2021/2 academic year vaccination declaration mandatory for students
Thank You!

Thank you
to every single one of our staff

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