

Background

A stoma is an opening to the skin made by a surgical procedure to allow the contents of the body to drain into a bag called an appliance. Patient use of these appliances and associated products varies according to the location of the surgery and patients' needs. Patients obtain their stoma products via a prescription from their GP, which is dispensed by a Community Pharmacy or Dispensing Appliance Contractor (DAC).

In the UK it is estimated that there are 122,000 people living with a stoma at any one time. Stoma formation can have a significant impact on patients' physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing. Most people will experience problems with their stoma at some point. Issues and complications can often be swiftly resolved when prompt advice is sought from a specially trained stoma professional.

Why have we developed this service?

The 6 CCGs; Liverpool, Warrington, Wirral, Knowsley, Halton and St. Helens individually identified inconsistent long-term care for stoma patients and many patients had not seen a stoma nurse for a long time. When complications arise these can be debilitating and have a significant impact on quality of life. Peristomal skin complications (PSCs) are the most common complication for patients with a stoma. Some patients do not seek help when experiencing problems and will try to manage alone. PSCs need to be diagnosed and treated at an early stage to prevent long term, debilitating complications, incurring additional costs to the NHS.

Presently, GPs are the main route for patients to obtain a prescription for their stoma appliances and supplies.

It is vital that stoma prescribing is appropriate for patients' needs. Improvements to the quality of prescribing of these products via specialist nurse input can deliver significant impact in terms of both quality of life and ensure best use of NHS resources. The development and implementation of accessory formularies and prescribing guidance has been developed as part of the establishment of the MARSS service to ensure optimised and cost-effective product selection. Due to the increasing number of accessories and stoma care formulations available, providing a rationale for patient use helps ensure product supply is in line with clinical need.

What Patient Engagement has been carried out to inform this service?

Engagement with patients was undertaken through focus groups and questionnaires sent to over 1000 patients. The survey responses demonstrated that while patients were generally happy with their care, 48% of patients had not seen a stoma nurse in the previous year. Patients told us that having someone to discuss any issues with would be highly beneficial. There were a few patients identified where complications were severely impacting their quality of life, for example a 19-year-old girl who had been having leakages for 3 years and was unable to leave the house for fear of odour. This was quickly resolved on consultation with a stoma nurse.

The MARSS Service

The 6 CCGs have been working collaboratively to establish the Merseyside and Region Stoma Service (MARSS), a joint community service that will transfer prescribing responsibility from GPs to the MARSS Specialist Stoma Nurses. MARSS will provide a telephone-based 'hub' for prescription requests, and local community clinic 'spokes' to provide ongoing community review and specialist nurse oversight across the 6 localities, delivering enhanced patient care. The service will be provided to the 5000 patients living with a stoma across the 6 CCG regions involved in this project.

We have designed this service for patients to receive an annual review with a stoma nurse. For the majority of patients it is in their best clinical interests to have contact with a stoma nurse periodically to ensure products remain suitable and ensure they are managing well with their stoma. There is also a duty of care for prescribers whether GP or stoma nurses to have sight of the patients they have prescribing responsibility for, in the same way we do for medicines. The importance of having an annual review, is that stomas change over time and early awareness of any problems can avoid escalation which may impact a patient's quality of life. Secondly new products come to market all the time, and a review of the products patients are using will ensure they are always using the right products to meet their particular needs.

Some patients we have engaged with have expressed a wish not to engage with the service in the frequency we have proposed. It is our intent to make this service as flexible as possible. While we will be establishing local clinics in convenient locations across the geography, video consultations and home visits we will also be available for patients that need to access the service through these routes. Despite this we are keen to ensure the experience of the MARSS service is able to meet the needs of all patients and we are having direct conversations with a minority of patients who have expressed a wish for their experience of MARSS to be different.

The Supplier Selection Process

The supplier for this service Bullen Healthcare, was identified through a formal procurement process. The services fall under the Light Touch Regime for the purposes of procurement pursuant to the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The CCGs adopted a pseudo Open Procedure approach whereby the contract opportunity was publicly advertised and open to all interested providers to tender the services, without undertaking pre-qualification shortlisting. An OJEU (Official Journal of the European Union) advertisement was published on 26 June 2020 and a Contracts Finder advertisement was published on 29 June 2020. Providers were able to submit completed bids between 29 June 2020 and 21 August 2020 and comprehensive and robust evaluation process was completed and the provider was selected based on the scores of their overall bid. The standstill period was concluded on 12th November and the contract was awarded shortly thereafter. 100% of the funding for this will come from the 6 CCGs according to their respective patient numbers..

How have we engaged with patients during mobilisation?

- We have written to all patients in the Halton, Wirral, Warrington and St Helens areas.
- We have completed 4 patient information presentations sessions, where we presented plans to patients and invited them to ask any questions to the mobilisation team.
- We have provided patients with a website with a comprehensive Q&A, an email address and phone number through which to ask any other questions.
- Where required we are having direct conversations with patients with concerns or anxieties about the proposed changes.
- We have also assembled a patient panel for patients to give direct feedback as we mobilise and launch the service.

Will patients be restricted in the products they can access?

We have been working with the acute stoma nurses from across the region to establish a formulary, the intent of this is to ensure the products used by patient are the most cost effective and make best use of NHS funds, while ensuring we meet ALL patient's clinical needs. There are some products where there is national guidance that argues against these products being prescribed as they don't add clinical value such as underwear and deodorants. We have consensus across all current acute (hospital based) stoma care teams that the formulary we have produced is fair, has sufficient products to meet the breadth of patient's needs and gives patients sufficient choice. However, we are also mindful that there are some patients that have been using these products for a long time and it would not make sense to disrupt their use of these products. The focus therefore will be guiding new patients predominantly to formulary items where the cost effectiveness of these products has been established.

There will be NO restrictions placed on the bags that patients use, we have had a range of accessories from a range of manufacturers included in the formulary. We established conflicts of interests at the outset of this work and the team involved came from a wide number of companies, therefore no single company dominated the decisions on the products to include in the formulary. We have also established 'quantity guidance'. This is needed as high quantities can be an indicator of stoma-related complications. There will not be any rationing of products but there may be clinical input should a patient request a high quantity to ensure there isn't an underlying clinical issue that needs resolving.

How are we ensuring patients' information is safe and secure?

The patient information for this service will be provided by the patients' GP to Bullen Healthcare for the purposes of delivering this contract. We are strictly adhering to GDPR legislation as well as NHS information governance standards, which will govern the data transfer and will ensure the security and protection of patient data for the duration of this contract. The legal basis for the data transfer under GDPR legislation is "performance of a task" Article 6(e) clause, and Article 9(h) "processing is necessary for the purposes of preventive or occupational medicine, for the assessment of the working capacity of the employee, medical diagnosis, the provision of health or social care or treatment"; collectively being to carry out a public task, the provision of Direct Care. Only the information needed to deliver this service will be used and data held only for as long as required. A DPIA has been developed for this service which has been approved by Midlands and Lancashire CSU IG team, the respective CCGs, CIOs and MidMerseyDA, who function on behalf of the region's GPs. Data processing agreements and Data Sharing Agreements have been drafted and approved by the CCGs and the relevant GPs to govern the initial data transfer. Bullen Healthcare have successfully completed an NHS Data Security and Protection Toolkit and provided copies of all data security and governance policies as part of the procurement scrutiny.

How are we monitoring this contract for quality?

We have a set of standards and performance indicators that will be used to monitor this service and ensure it is consistently delivering a safe, effective and high-quality service. We are working with the provider to review and sign off all protocols and policies to ensure the service is delivered to the same high standard we expect from all NHS services. The nurses that have been recruited for this service are experienced nurses with a wealth of expertise and long tenure in NHS acute colorectal services, they also have a special qualification (v300) enabling them to prescribe.

How are we managing conflicts of Interest?

The provider of the MARSS service, Bullen Healthcare are not a manufacturer of product and therefore remain agnostic on the products patient are prescribed. However, as a commercial company we recognise there may be conflicts of interest. We are managing any potential conflicts through contractual levers, through performance indicators designed to monitor for any commercial conflicts as well as a policy developed between the CCGs and the provider to govern the MARSS service.

How are we monitoring this contract to ensure high quality care and patient experience?

- Patients will receive a questionnaire on an annual basis asking their opinion of the quality of care they experience.
- Patients will also be able to raise any concerns or compliments through formal and informal routes.
- All of the feedback mechanisms available to patients will be summarised in a patient information leaflet we are developing for this purpose.
- We are also establishing a patient panel, formed with patients who want to be involved in how this service is developed and delivered, to help us to get it right on day one, but also improve the service as we go along and help us ensure we are able to best meet patient's needs.