COVID-19 response in England: the role of BMJ Best Practice

An interview with Steve Glover, Head of Library Services in Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust.

Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust is one of the largest NHS acute trusts in England and is a teaching hospital associated with Manchester Medical School at the University of Manchester. MFT manages 11 hospitals plus the NHS Nightingale Hospital North West, with almost 22,000 staff.

During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the trust had to make changes to how it managed clinical practice, to create capacity to take in new patients with COVID-19. For some of the trust’s medical staff this also included moving to respiratory care and the new COVID-19 wards. However, as medical staff of all grades and students prepared to meet this challenge, they needed education and support to help them in their new roles.

BMJ Best Practice is funded by Health Education England, and free to all NHS staff. We spoke to Steve Glover, Head of Library Services at MFT, who told us how he found the usage of BMJ Best Practice accelerated when COVID-19 cases peaked in England - as healthcare professionals turned to the resource for support. We saw that use of BMJ Best Practice in MFT continued to increase through the summer, despite cases reducing at that time, showing a new affinity for the resource.

“At the beginning of the pandemic, the library team decided to carefully promote selected resources to trainees, with an explanation about why each one was important. MFT is one of the highest users of BMJ Best Practice in England, and we promoted the BMJ Best Practice website and app to support trainees caring for patients with COVID-19, and other conditions.”

Steve describes that during the first wave of the pandemic the correlation he found between the usage of BMJ Best Practice and the Office of National Statistics (ONS) data of COVID-19 cases in the UK.

“Our trainees are familiar with BMJ Best Practice; however during the pandemic, I saw a significant increase in the use of BMJ Best Practice, closely aligned with the peak of cases in April and the redeployment of medical staff onto COVID-19 wards.”

Figure 1: Correlation between BMJ Best Practice usage, and ONS data of COVID-19 cases in England.
“The most used topics in BMJ Best Practice during the first wave of the pandemic included ‘Coronavirus disease 2019’, and relevant differential diagnoses such as ‘acute exacerbation of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease’ and ‘pulmonary embolism’.”

“Using specific guidance on COVID-19 enhanced an already strong relationship between our trainees and BMJ Best Practice, as usage data shows a continued increase throughout June and July. Healthcare professionals are using the resource not just for COVID-19 support but are now turning to it to provide support in other areas. Our highest used topics also include colorectal cancer, spinal cord compression and acute pancreatitis showing the breadth of support BMJ Best Practice can provide.”

Professor Margaret Kingston, Group Associate Medical Director: Medical Education at MFT adds:

“It is fascinating to see the link between Covid cases in England and the BMJBP searches undertaken in our hospitals during our response to the first Covid surge. During this time many health care professionals including doctors and dentists were re-deployed into acute medicine. From this information it looks like a number took advantage of the support offered via BMJBP in dealing with clinical scenarios they do not routinely deal with in their usual practice.”

From March - July, there have been more than 1.2 million-page views of the COVID-19 topic on BMJ Best Practice worldwide. This number is continuing to increase. We invite other trusts to contact us to share their stories of using BMJ Best Practice to support healthcare professionals’ response to the pandemic.

BMJ Best Practice is a generalist point of care tool particularly useful for junior doctors, multidisciplinary teams, GPs, pharmacists, paramedics, specialists working outside of their specialty, and medical students making the transition to practice.

Uniquely structured around the patient consultation with advice on symptom evaluation, test ordering and treatment approach, BMJ Best Practice enables healthcare professionals to treat their patients with confidence, anywhere, anytime.

The new Comorbidities tool from BMJ Best Practice also enables healthcare professionals to add their patient’s acute and existing conditions to instantly create a tailored management plan. BMJ’s expert panel has found multiple instances where better treatment of comorbidities should prevent complications in patients with COVID-19. BMJ has made the COVID-19 and acute exacerbation of COPD topics freely available in response to the pandemic.

Access to BMJ Best Practice is funded by Health Education England - so it is freely available to all NHS staff and learners. Visit bmj.com/hee and start using BMJ Best Practice today!