



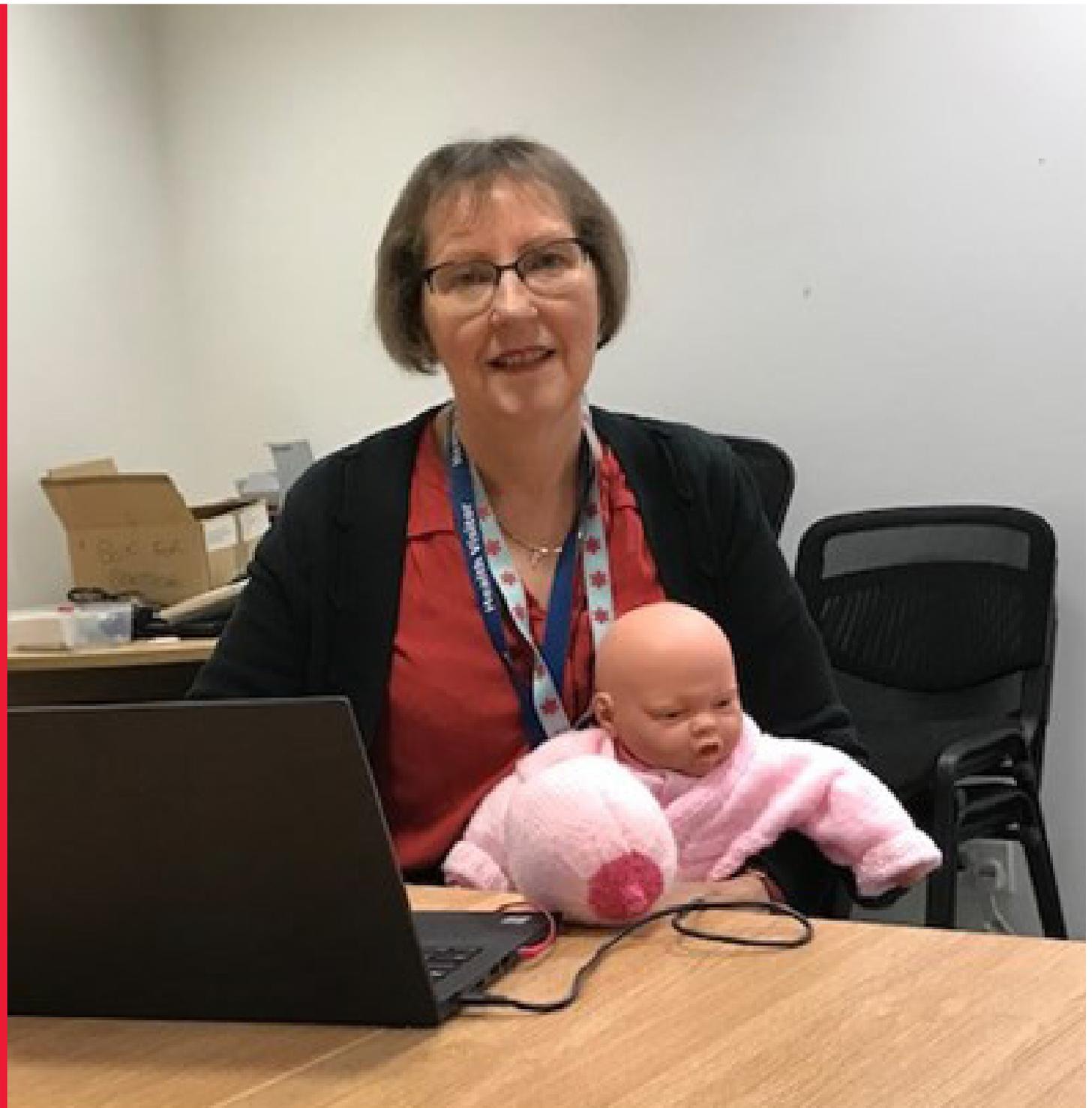
Case study

## Introducing virtual clinics

Providing virtual consultations and group sessions for service users during the COVID-19 pandemic

# Summary

- We implemented new technology to allow clinicians to continue to engage with patients, families and other service users during the pandemic
- We've received excellent feedback from across the country
- A survey in Essex saw 84% of people give their virtual clinics five stars



## The challenge

Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was essential that we moved swiftly to find alternative ways of communicating with patients, families and other service users.

We needed to find solutions to ensure vulnerable people could continue to reach us and to help those with long term conditions to self-manage, in order to reduce pressure on accident and emergency departments during this challenging time.

We also had to find a different way of delivering sessions like baby clinics and parenting groups, which were traditionally run face-to-face, so that we could continue to offer our support whilst at the same time keeping families and our staff safe from the virus.

It was essential that any digital solution was easy to access, easy to use, and secure from an information governance perspective.

We needed to agree the new ways of working, roll them out and raise awareness of them in a timely manner to minimise any gaps in service delivery following the introduction of lockdown measures.

## The solution

We sourced a number of virtual solutions, including specialist platforms to host virtual consultations and group sessions, and provided training to colleagues on the use of the new tools. Therapists and nurses are able to use this technology to host clinics, with service users joining using their personal mobile phone, tablet or computer.

Sessions have included support for those with long term conditions such as respiratory and heart conditions, people with diabetes who required shielding, and families who want advice about topics such as infant feeding and school readiness. Groups have also been used to support care homes, patients staying in community hospitals, as well as with patients who live at home.

The process has been enthusiastically supported by patient groups and enabled people to access clinical advice to support their self-management in areas like exercise, techniques refinement and condition management. The sessions have also allowed clinicians to provide ad-hoc advice and guidance.

Here are some examples of how we have used the technology and the **difference it has made** across the country:

### Essex

Our team in Essex is now offering secure one-to-one video appointments from health visitors, pediatricians, family support workers and school nurses in addition to an existing text messaging service where young people can anonymously ask advice on a range of issues.

It has also replaced its face-to-face antenatal, infant feeding, school readiness and parent emotional wellbeing support sessions with virtual sessions, which have been widely publicised via social media and in local press.

Feedback shows:

- 84% of people who have accessed each service have given the help they received five stars – the highest mark available.
- A further 13% have awarded the services they have accessed four stars.
- 82% of people said they would recommend the services to others

## Lancashire

Health visitors and school nurses in Lancashire are offering similar one-to-one and group support as colleagues in Essex.

However, the team here built its virtual groups from scratch, consulting with staff and families to ask what topics they wanted to know more about and what times they would prefer them to take place. The team then developed content for the sessions and piloted them to a small number of families before starting to roll them out wider. Some of the course content is shared on the Lancashire Healthy Young People and Families website so even more families can benefit. In just four weeks, more than 330 families were invited to attend group sessions.

Here are some of the comments from those who attended:

- *"I found the talk really helpful. I think doing it online is probably much better than trying to get lots of people to come to a hall. It means people who can't get out or don't have access to transport can still get involved"*
- *"Really useful, it helped me prepare for stating my baby on solids, I found it really easy to access"*
- *"Really easy to access, answered all my questions and made me feel more confident"*

The Macmillan Information and Support Service, hosted by our West Lancashire team, has been running virtual mindfulness and wellbeing classes for patients, in partnership with Lancashire Adult Learning. All classes quickly became fully booked. The sessions were also rolled out to staff at West Lancashire GP surgeries and Virgin Care staff. The service's Patient Support Group and WOW (Women Only Wednesday) group have also switched their meetings to virtual.

## Wiltshire

In Wiltshire, specialist health visitors have been using our virtual platform to give breastfeeding advice to parents who have been referred to the specialist infant feeding service from their health visitor.

Marian Judd, one of our specialist health visitors, said:

*"The advantage of using a video link is I can see and talk to both parents whereas if I just called on the phone I would only be able to talk to mum and of course not be able to demonstrate anything.*

*"The response has been really positive and parents have told me that this has been really helpful and supportive. It is professional and enables us as health visitors to offer help and support with infant feeding in a timely way and enable families to remain in the safety of their homes.*

*"It is not a substitute for a face-to-face contact where we are able to fully assess and examine a baby, but we are able to observe a feed and support parents in a new and innovative way."*

The use of virtual clinics continues to be analysed, with a focus on understanding the user experience and the potential to support more people through a reduction in travel and estates costs if the programme continues after the pandemic response.



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