A new project in the Highlands has shown how technology can be used to support the delivery of person-centred care.

The My Cancer Portal (MCP) project is part of the Transforming Care After Treatment programme and was set up to improve cancer care and support. It offered selected patients with colorectal cancer the ability to use a secure app or website to access information about their illness and treatment, seek emotional, practical and financial support and communicate easily with their cancer team.

The portal was well-used by patients and welcomed by staff. Work is now underway to offer the same online resource to a wider group of patients within NHS Highlands. Decision-makers across the NHS are being urged to look at the project and to test in other health board areas within the North of Scotland how its lessons can be used to offer person-centred cancer care across Scotland.

How it worked

My Cancer Portal was launched in April 2015 after being designed in consultation with patients and staff in primary and secondary care. It was created to communicate with all existing e-health systems.

MCP was offered to selected patients with colorectal cancer in NHS Highland. 33 patients took part in the first phase of testing. Staff received training on the new system and patients were sent a presentation on how to use MCP.

It allowed patients to:

• see the records about them held by their cancer care team
• read their Treatment Summary, a document that sets out the treatment the person with cancer has received and is completed by the patient’s Multi-disciplinary Team.
• fill out a Holistic Needs Assessment (HNA), a questionnaire that asks people about their medical, emotional, practical and financial needs and then request support
• complete symptom diaries
• exchange messages with their healthcare team
• be signposted to valuable sources of information
• write down their thoughts and feelings in an area only accessible to them.

The HNA and Treatment Summary sections were automatically added to the electronic records on patients held by their GP.
What was the impact?

The initial results were very encouraging. Six months after the test phase launched:

- 31 out of the of 33 patients approached to take part in the pilot were using the portal.
- 185 online sessions had been completed, lasting an average of seven minutes.
- Eight pages are viewed during the average session.
- The messaging function was the most popular page visited.
- The HNA page was the second most popular.
- The messaging function was used to ask about symptoms, appointments and results.
- One third of people used the portal through iPads, 45% use PCs and 25% use phones.

What next?

As people become increasingly used to going online for information, there is a need to provide people with secure, easy to use digital spaces where they can see the information health teams hold on them, request support and ask questions and receive quick answers.

The encouraging early results of My Cancer Portal highlights the important role technology can play in delivering person-centred care for people with cancer.

The project was successful in obtaining a second phase of funding from the TCAT programme. It is now looking at testing the MCP with all colorectal cancer patients in NHS Highland, as well as looking at how the portal could be used by people with other cancer types in other health board areas in the North of Scotland.

Work is also underway to introduce an electronic care plan to MCP, where the care and support patient will receive will be outlined. A searchable registry of support services that patients can access is also planned.

It is hoped health leaders will look at MCP as an example of using technology to deliver better patient care and look at how the portal could be utilised in their health boards.

About the TCAT programme

TCAT was set up to improve the way people with cancer are supported during and after treatment. It’s a partnership between the Scottish Government, Macmillan Cancer Support, NHS Scotland and local authorities. It tests and spreads new models of care and support built around what people with cancer need.