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Oral Max Triage and Teledentistry Patient Pathways: A Response to COVID-19 & Beyond

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Background

COVID-19 restrictions were introduced in South Australia for private and public dental services in March 2020. As a result, SA Dental Service (SADS) and Adelaide Dental Hospital (ADH) became focal points for triaging and treating emergency dental cases.

Objectives

A digital health solution was needed to remotely triage patients, reliably capture patient histories, and deliver emergency specialist telehealth consults. The solution needed to be deployed within days and support rapidly changing COVID-19 protocols. It was also important to achieve high patient response rates to minimise the need for in-person assessments where clinically appropriate.

Digital Innovation

To respond to the surge in demand, manual workflows were converted into digital patient pathways in partnership with Personify Care. Patients were invited to their care pathway via SMS, provided a secure checklist that screened their health history and, where appropriate, triggered an emergency specialist video consult.

Clinicians controlled the pathways and could update them directly in accordance with SA Health guidelines, as required.

Results

Patients responded to the digital pathways at a rate of 97%. Over 6,581 clinical risk factors were automatically screened, enabling staff to triage patients and provide emergency care remotely.

Within the first 24 hours of South Australia's November COVID-19 lockdown, the digital patient pathways enabled SADS staff to triage and provide emergency care to 90 inbound patients remotely. As a result, only one patient required hospital admission.

The solution has now been extended to the pre-admission assessment of non-emergency patients prior to surgery at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. This has further reduced the administrative burden for SADS. Staff feedback is overwhelmingly positive: "Very user-friendly programme with many advantages to our booking procedures."

Conclusion

Digital patient pathways can simultaneously achieve a personalised patient experience and increase health services' capacity to deliver high-value care to patients during COVID-19 and beyond.