

Clinical decision support helps London Trust rebuild training and focus on health equity post-pandemic



UpToDate measurably impacts decision-making for junior and senior doctors

The unprecedentedly high demand for hospital services during the COVID-19 pandemic not only put a strain on clinical resources and staff at Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals Trust (BHRUT), it resulted in restructured priorities and a disruption to some of the Trust's educational routines.

Junior clinicians were at a particular disadvantage during the pandemic, missing out on vital training opportunities. More widely, there is now a pressing need to get up to speed with the evidence shift over the last two years, concerning COVID-19 and changes to clinical practice across all specialities.

To support clinical training in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, BHRUT, which provides healthcare services to people across Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge, used a grant provided by Health Education England (HEE) to adopt UpToDate® clinical decision support system from Wolters Kluwer.

"There was some terribly high pressure at the front doors of our organisation because of COVID — and because of everything else that hadn't been done due to COVID — leaving little space for learning," explains Dr. John Brecknell, DME, who notes that the Trust's decision to invest in UpToDate was driven by a desire to help clinicians get back on track with Continuous Professional Development (CPD). "We have built up a deficit of training over two years, and instead of easing, it's actually deepening. Initiatives like this, which springboard learning and make opportunities available to plug back into personal development, have an important place here."



"Having access to the same decision-making tools across the system is one way of starting to address healthcare inequalities."

Dr. John Brecknell
Director of Medical Education (DME)

Supporting junior doctors in learning and at the point of care

BHRUT Medical Education Teaching Fellow Senel Hazal has experienced firsthand how UpToDate can support junior doctors, not only in terms of education, but also when working on the wards. “The hospital area is extremely busy, and sometimes when you want a specific answer quickly, no one’s nearby. UpToDate helps to bridge that gap,” she says.

Yet there are different levels to clinical uncertainty, Dr. Hazal explains. Sometimes clinicians already have a solid understanding of the issue before them but might need confirmation that they’re on the right track. “UpToDate helps to consolidate my thinking,” she adds. “If I need a refresher on a certain topic, it’s as easy as getting my phone out on the way to see my patient.”

Analysis of usage of UpToDate at BHRUT shows the important role it plays in helping its clinicians refine their decisions at the point they are being made. Between September 2021 and March 2022, referring to UpToDate resulted in nearly 3,000 clinical decisions being revised in the face of the evidence presented. It also led to reinforcing more than 6,500 decisions about which a degree of uncertainty existed.

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Senior Doctor Rajith De Silva, Neurology

Reliable access to the latest evidence for senior doctors

The benefits of UpToDate are not exclusive to junior doctors: The Trust’s subscription means that any clinician with an NHS login has access. “Some of our most avid advocates are our consultants,” says Dr. Brecknell. “Ultimately, if you stop learning when training ends, then it won’t be long before your knowledge becomes redundant.”

Usage data at BHRUT reinforces this, revealing that 69% of users are senior physicians and 10% junior doctors.

Senior Doctor Rajith De Silva, who works in the Trust’s neurology department, uses UpToDate to get reliable, detailed information from the tool’s 7,000+ contributors. “If I’ve got a really difficult neuropathy case, I’ll phone colleagues to get their opinion. UpToDate works in a similar ‘phone-a-friend’ way: It offers a professorial consultation, granting me access to insights from clinicians around the world whose guidance I would otherwise have little exposure to.”

Nephrology and neurology are the two most-viewed topic specialities at BHRUT, followed by infectious diseases and gastroenterology.

Dr. De Silva believes that UpToDate has made a “palpable difference” in improving health outcomes and enhancing clinical efficiency at the Trust: “It allows us to spend more of our time effectively by relieving the burden of retaining so much knowledge, while also providing the evidence-based granular detail needed to avoid errors that arise in our clinical practice.”

Addressing healthcare inequity

There is a strategic objective across the NHS to improve equity in healthcare, ensuring all patients receive the same high standards of care regardless of their location, socioeconomic background, gender or race. Healthcare inequalities among minority ethnic populations are a particularly pressing issue, as highlighted in a recent report by the NHS Race and Health Observatory¹

Ensuring healthcare equality is a particularly pressing issue for BHRUT, which serves three of London's most diverse boroughs, with Barking having the highest IMD (index of multiple deprivation) score in the capital.

As has been found across the NHS, UpToDate offers a practical solution for ensuring patients receive a consistently high standard of care, by putting the same best-practice evidence and recommendations into the hands of all clinician users, wherever they are working. "Having access to the same decision-making tools across the system is one way of starting to address healthcare inequalities," says Dr. Brecknell.

With bias-free content that is sensitive to ethnic differences, UpToDate can also help to reverse the trend of ethnic minorities receiving different standards of care. Dr. Brecknell references Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) as a condition for which UpToDate helps to ensure consistency of care. It is widely known that the hereditary condition is much more prevalent among people from African or African-Caribbean origin, and yet doctors are often underserved with the latest evidence for dealing with it. Equipping clinicians with the latest evidence-based recommendations for treating SCD is just one example of how UpToDate can boost healthcare equity.



BHRUT Usage Analysis of UpToDate *September 2021 to March 2022*

Decision Impact

2,981 –
Projected Decisions Influenced*

6,541 –
Projected Decisions Reinforced*

* Projections are calculated by taking the number of searches within the reporting period from your organisation, multiplied by the overall percent of decisions influenced or decisions reinforced as reported by all customers in 2019.

Top 5 Medical Topics by Views

- ✓ Overview of the treatment of hyponatremia in adults: **71**
- ✓ Systemic therapy for non-operable metastatic colorectal cancer: Selecting the initial therapeutic approach: **63**
- ✓ Diagnostic evaluation of adults with hyponatremia: **57**
- ✓ COVID-19: Management in hospitalized adults: **55**
- ✓ Diagnostic approach to hypercalcemia: **40**

Top 5 Topic Specialties by Views

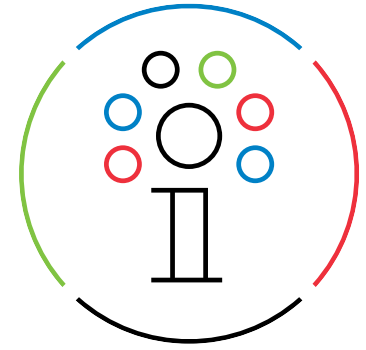
- ✓ Neurology: **1,728**
- ✓ Nephrology and Hypertension: **1,249**
- ✓ Infectious Diseases: **1,152**
- ✓ Gastroenterology and Hepatology: **1,096**
- ✓ Endocrinology and Diabetes: **1,091**

Ongoing opportunities to improve outcomes

Dr. De Silva, Dr. Hazal and Dr. Brecknell all speak highly of the impact UpToDate has had on the Trust since it was introduced. From reactivating learning and training opportunities, to advancing the Trust's digital maturity, to helping junior doctors more easily overcome daily dilemmas, UpToDate can serve as another tool in the Trust's armoury for post-pandemic recovery.

Dr. De Silva says he believes it's an "amazing privilege" to access a tool which helps him reduce errors, cut delays, and ultimately improve health outcomes for patients. "I think it would be a fantastic development which could benefit colleagues and patients if used more widely."

¹ Ethnic Inequalities in Healthcare: A Rapid Evidence Review by the NHS Race and Health Observatory



About the organisation

Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals Trust (BHRUT) provides healthcare services to people across Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge, including all the major specialities and specialist neurosciences services. With a workforce of 7,500, BHRUT operates from two main sites — King George Hospital in Goodmayes and Queen's Hospital in Romford — and has two of the busiest emergency departments in London.



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