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Dr Falk/Guts UK Awards 2023

NURSE RECOGNITION AWARD WINNER: Ms Pearl Avery

PROJECT: An Advanced Nurse Practitioner with a Special Interest in GI Evaluation of Patient Benefit



Ms Avery is an Advanced Nurse Practitioner (ANP) with a Special Interest in Gastroenterology at Wyke Regis & Lanehouse Medical Practice in Dorset and an ANP IBD at St Mark's Hospital in London.

Ms Avery explains:

'Over my career in secondary care I have seen many patients being referred who didn't need to be, or who had been on a circular journey between primary and secondary care, possibly seeing several specialists and having multiple tests without resolution of symptoms. As a result, I have given a lot of thought as to how patients with Inflammatory Bowel Disease could be managed differently and how we might be able to share the expertise from secondary care with our colleagues in primary care to achieve this.

'Around 30% of GP appointments are GI related, yet GPs do not generally have the specialist knowledge or the confidence to make a diagnosis and/or treatment decisions in this area. At the same time, there is much emphasis on spotting 'red flag' GI symptoms, which inevitably leads to GPs erring on the side of caution and referring to secondary care.

'Post pandemic I offered my services as a ANP to a local GP practice, and they had the foresight to see that this could be a positive change for them. It's fair to say that on the first day, neither myself nor the managers knew exactly how I might work with them, but it quickly became apparent how I could fit into their working systems.

'Initially I was given patients with general presentations, some with histories and some who were new, although this later evolved into all GI related issues and symptoms. For GI related and complex presentations, I had a half hour slot, allowing me to take a thorough history including all tests and treatments.

'Having specialist GI skills and experience of secondary care enabled me to either diagnose and treat patients there and then, to order relevant tests or, if necessary, make the best quality referrals.

'Over a six-month period, out of the 65 GI patients I saw, 58 were given or had a firm diagnosis which resulted in treatment or referral. The most common diagnosis was of constipation and haemorrhoids (n=11) respectively. These patients were examined, received treatment and bleeding was resolved in all cases. Eight patients had infections, including two with worms who were also treated successfully. Two cases of intractable diarrhoea had received a diagnosis of microscopic colitis 18 months previously but were not being treated.

They were started on budesonide and the symptoms resolved with a resultant huge improvement in their quality of life. Three ulcerative colitis patients had their mesalazine treatment optimised, avoiding the need to contact IBD services. One patient with a history of anal cancer was referred on.

'I do a full day with six slots for complex GI and another 21 slots including triage of any patient calls with a bowel issue. I often order tests before I see them in clinic, which saves time and leads to better quality diagnosis.

'The next stage is to carry out a proper cost benefit analysis of this project along with a patient survey. From this, I hope to offer this service out to other local GP networks, either with me or potentially other specialist IBD nurses.

'This has been an extremely fulfilling project. It has been lovely to get patient feedback on how simple measures such as rapid diagnosis and effective treatment at a primary care level can really change lives.'

Ms Avery's manager, Dr Rachel Stow, GP Partner at Wyke Regis & Lanehouse Medical Practice comments:

'Pearl joined the practice here in September 2021, quickly demonstrating the value of her specialist knowledge in inflammatory bowel disease and wider gastrointestinal conditions.

'The dedicated slots for GI patients are in high demand and over subscribed. Her service evaluation clearly shows the benefit for patients. Pearl has also supported the wider team with her knowledge and experience of supporting treating and assisting diagnosis for patients with ACP training sessions and support for medical colleagues as requested.

'As a practise we have supported Pearl's innovation of this novel role and will continue to do so due to the obvious benefits for the patients and the team.'

Ms Avery states:

'I believe that this project has provided real benefit to patients and the GP practice, and I am passionate about taking this out to GP networks to see if this model may be adopted by other practices. This award has provided me with the funding to support this idea, giving me capacity to work on the analysis which will allow me to clearly demonstrate the cost benefit and how the model can fit into primary care.

'On a personal level, I am extremely proud of this work. It has been really good to receive the validation that winning such an award brings. I would also like to thank Wyke Regis & Lanehouse Medical Practice who were willing to support this novel role.'



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