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Keyword

Topic

Date range

From

To

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NHS to launch ground breaking online COVID-19 rehab service

📅 5 July 2020

Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response Patient care

Tens of thousands of people who are suffering long-term effects of coronavirus will benefit from a revolutionary on-demand recovery service, the head of the NHS has announced today.

Nurses and physiotherapists will be on hand to reply to patients' needs either online or over the phone as part of the service.

The new 'Your COVID Recovery' service forms part of NHS plans to expand access to COVID-19 rehabilitation treatments for those who have survived the virus but still have problems with breathing, mental health problems or other complications.



Coming on the day of the NHS's anniversary, chief executive Sir Simon Stevens has hailed the new service as a great example of the way the health service is increasingly harnessing technology and innovation to enhance the face to face care that doctors, nurses, therapists and other staff can provide in a safe and convenient way.

It follows the building of a new Seacole rehabilitation centre to help those most seriously affected by the deadly virus, with similar facilities expected to open across the country.

Patients who have been in hospital or suffered at home with the virus will have access to a face-to-face consultation with their local rehabilitation team, usually comprising of physiotherapists, nurses and mental health specialists.

Following this initial assessment, those who need it will be offered a personalised package of online-based aftercare lasting up to 12 weeks, available later this Summer.

Accessible, on-demand, from the comfort of their own home, this will include:

- Access to a local clinical team including nurses and physiotherapists who can respond either online or over the phone to any enquiries from patients;
- An online peer-support community for survivors – particularly helpful for those who may be recovering at home alone;
- Exercise tutorials that people can do from home to help them regain muscle strength and lung function in particular, and;
- Mental health support, which may include a psychologist within the online hub or referral into NHS mental health services along with information on what to expect post-COVID.

Sir Simon Stevens said: "COVID-19 has been the biggest challenge in the NHS's history, and the fact that we have come through the first peak without services being overwhelmed and being able to give expert care to everyone who needed it, is testament all our frontline and support staff.

"Now, as we celebrate the birthday of the NHS and look ahead to the next phase of our response, while in-person care will continue to be vital, the health service is embracing the best that new technology can offer us to meet the significant level of new and ongoing need.

"Rolling out Your COVID Recovery, alongside expanding and strengthening community health and care services, is another example of how the NHS must bring the old and the new

together to create better and more convenient services for patients.”

NHS staff responded rapidly to the COVID-19 outbreak to care for more than 100,000 patients in hospital, and many more in the community.

Thanks to their efforts everyone who could benefit from care was able to get it, and the overwhelming majority survived.

However, evidence shows that many of those survivors are likely to have significant on-going health problems, including breathing difficulties, enduring tiredness, reduced muscle function, impaired ability to perform vital everyday tasks and mental health problems such as PTSD, anxiety and depression.

The online portal will help ensure that people get the support they need to recover from the effects of the virus, including those associated with spending a long time on ventilation, while reducing the need to physically attend appointments for many.

The first phase of the service will launch later this month, providing the latest advice on recovering from the virus, which will be available to all and continually improved and added to.

The second phase, in which people who need it will be able to access personalised support packages, is in development by experts based in Leicester and will be made available later in the summer.

In order to access this part of the site, patients will first attend a face-to-face assessment, which may include a walking test, to help personalise care and ensure people get the type of support and rehabilitation specific to their need, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

For those who need ongoing care, they will be given a log-in to the new online site, which will be accessible from any web-enabled phone, tablet, television or computer.

Where patients don't already have access to a suitable device to use the online platform, printed materials will be made depending upon demand to ensure the service is accessible to all.

Rehabilitation professionals will be able to access their patient's data to enable remote care and monitoring, ensuring that anyone who might need further face-to-face checks or

treatment can get it.

Professor Sally Singh with a team from University Hospitals of Leicester NHS has been working with national clinical leaders to build the service and is now working with the NHS nationally to roll it out across the country.

Professor Singh from the University of Leicester said: “We know the impact of COVID on people can be far reaching and complex, ‘Your COVID Recovery’ is specifically designed to support people in their recovery post-coronavirus, this will be one of the first sites in the world rolled out nationally seeking to address potential post-COVID symptoms and support people on the road to recovery.

“We have brought together a wide range of experts representing a number of professional societies who have made valuable contributions to the site, to allow us to have a comprehensive package of information and advice. Importantly we have worked with people with first-hand experience of COVID to help shape the site and make sure the content was fit for purpose.”

Alongside bringing back non-urgent services in a safe way and maintaining a high state of readiness for any future increase in COVID cases, local health leaders are currently working with councils and voluntary groups to plan how they will meet the additional ongoing demand for rehabilitation services post-COVID.

While in many cases these services will be delivered by or within existing NHS facilities, where necessary plans may include using temporary facilities like the first NHS Seacole Centre, a dedicated rehabilitation and step-down facility which opened in Surrey at the end of May.

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