

PROVIDING THE GIFT OF COMMUNICATION

**In Critical Care Settings
Easy, Scalable Patient-Family
Communication in Hospital ICUs**

OVERVIEW

King's Health Partners is an Academic Health Sciences Centre in London which consists of universities, NHS hospitals and other organizations that are engaged in world class research, education and clinical practice. The Life Lines Project came to fruition because of a need to connect ICU patients under lockdown to their families on the outside. ICU access for family members of those undergoing critical care were barred. National guidance called for using mobile devices and video-calling to facilitate virtual communication, particularly for those who were approaching the end of their lives.

It is important to note that UK was one of the first countries with an influx of COVID-19 patients in ICUs. It was not so much about flattening the curve, but rather provide a communicational support to those who needed it most, the patients and their respective families. The goal was to see that all communicational needs were met throughout the hospitalization period in what was a sensitive time for all involved.

APPROACH

With expertise from Prof. Louise Rose, Prof. of Critical Care Nursing at King’s College London and Dr. Joel Meyer, a critical care consultant at Guy’s and St. Thomas’s Hospital, we were able to design a solution that would reliably and securely connect patients in ICUs all across UK to their dear ones. After a successful trial at Guy’s and St. Thomas, the program was rolled out to 172 more hospitals in a countrywide operation.

Our platform aTouchAway™ was loaded onto the 4G enabled tablets donated by partners. Where possible, patient consent for virtual visits was gained prior to intubation or sedation. If not, presumed consent was assumed which reflects the protocols for regular in person ICU visits. Each ICU unit added their patients to the platform using their names only. Their family members were sent invites using their email address to add them as contacts.

ICU staff would coordinate a time for video calls with the family members via messaging in the platform. When the time for the call arrived, both parties would be connected virtually. By switching back and forth between the front and back camera, the staff could update the family on the patient’s condition and also show the patient where private talks between the patient and family member could ensue. If bad news had to be delivered to the families, follow up check-in calls were scheduled to see if they were doing okay.

Upon the deletion of the patient from the system, their name and the family member’s contact details were both erased permanently. All the information was stored in local UK servers as per compliance.



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They have been very easy to set up and use and have been well received by the staff and by the families of our patients. They have made the most upsetting and difficult times a little bit easier by bringing our patients' families in touch with, and able to see, their loved ones.

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-Lead Nurse Critical Care



CONCLUSION

The project Life Lines by Aetonix has been instrumental for bringing virtual communications at a mass scale to an area of healthcare that is usually starved off any communication, let alone at a crisis time where isolation is mandatory. It has eased the workload of ICU staff by giving them a virtual mechanism to connect folks, and it has provided much needed solace to patients, families and also clinicians, who only want to provide higher quality of care to their patients. Such type of bold initiative has further potential for continental scale, either in Europe or North America.