

By women, for women



How one team with a special interest in women's health have completely transformed care in their community.

WORDS BY
EMMA COOPER

In 2018, GP Care Services, Pennine Acute Trust, BMI Highfield and Inhealth won the bid to deliver Integrated Elective Care Pathways (IECPs) across Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale (HMR) for various specialities, one of which was gynaecology. The aim of the service was to treat common women's health problems in the community, provide easier access to treatment for women, reach women from ethnic backgrounds, provide holistic care and reduce the waiting lists in secondary care.

Back to the beginning

Working in a practice in Rochdale when the bid was won, Dr Uma Marthi had already been providing

care for women in the community. Uma trained in India and came to the UK in 1996 with the intention of becoming a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist.

Fuelled by her passion for women's health, Uma grabbed the opportunity to roll out an all-female staffed gynaecology and ultrasound service, serving the whole practice-based commissioning cluster. The team, including administration assistants, doctors and nurses, work together to ensure that the clinic, led by women for women, is as efficient and effective as possible. From ordering stock to managing budgets, the appointments are arranged with a whole patient view at the heart; considering which clinic a woman should attend and where so that if they have to catch a taxi, they spend the least amount of money.



I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WOULD DO WITHOUT DR MARTHI AND JO. I HAVEN'T SEEN A GP SINCE...IT MUST BE FOUR YEARS... SO THE ONLY DOCTOR I SEE IS DR MARTHI AND SHE'S WONDERFUL AND I CAN TELL HER ANYTHING. I'M GETTING SO MUCH HELP. SO MUCH HELP.

The service specialities include:

- Menstrual disorders
- Management of menopause
- HRT advice (complex clinical scenarios)
- Pelvic pain
- Conservative management of endometriosis
- Vaginal discharge
- Urinary incontinence
- Subfertility
- Complex contraceptive needs
- Adolescent gynae problems

The one-stop clinic also offers the following procedures:

- Endometrial biopsy
- Insertion and removal of IUDs/IUSs
- Ring pessary fitting/removal
- Insertion and removal of all types of pessaries (Ring, Milax, Gellhorn, Shelf, POPY, etc)
- Removal of cervical polyps
- Cauterisation of cervical ectropion (if recent cervical smear results are normal)

Now, with over 16 years' experience and a Member of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Dr Marthi has also completed a certificate in ultrasonography run by the University of Salford and has been able to offer an onsite pelvic ultrasound service.

Benefits

Clinics are spread across the HMR area to provide high-quality care equally to all women in the community. Local GPs provide the use of a room in their surgery to run the service from and there are currently 2–3 sessions per week. With a typical waiting time of 4–5 weeks, the team ensure they work flexibly, dependent on the amount of referrals, to keep waiting times to a minimum for patients.

The clinic also provides home visits and travel to patients in nursing homes. By packing up their equipment in a car, the team can visit elderly women, disabled women and are working hard to reach asylum seekers or women from different ethnic backgrounds who may be reluctant to present to their GPs with gynaecological symptoms.

The service aims to address this issue and provide a cost-effective alternative to hospital referral. The clinic now receives referrals from nurses and doctors and runs both a scanning and gynaecology clinic on a twice-weekly basis.

Results

The clinic has established clinical care pathways to colposcopy clinics, counsellors, psychosexual counsellors, continence advisors, radiology and pathology.

By triaging referrals and using community services, Dr Marthi's



team, which includes Dr Shalini Gadiyar and Dr Noreen Khan, has succeeded in significantly reducing patient waiting times and, for the women who need specialist care, their waiting time has also been reduced.

The team had an aim to hold 16 clinics per month, which is now increasing to 18–20 a month. Over the last 12 months, from November 2021 to November 2022, the clinic has received 647 referrals and carried out 1,149 consultations.

Following in their footsteps

Training and education is an integral part of the service provision and a range of practical skills are taught, including coils, ultrasonography, ring pessary insertion/removal, cervical smears, implant contraception, and STI counselling and testing. GP trainees and practice nurses regularly attend the clinics to better understand the management of women's health issues.

Patients are asked to fill in feedback forms after every consultation so that the whole team can regularly meet to discuss and continually improve the service.



Dr Marthi hopes that many more GPs will come forward and start their own community gynae clinics, and has been contacted by GPs across the UK and Ireland who have been inspired by her work. Her team is also working on establishing good support networks with local secondary care hospitals when discussions have to be had or referrals need to be made. ♀

► Go to www.gpcareservices.co.uk