

Strategic and Industry Partnerships



Building long-term partnerships to deliver better outcomes for patients and cost savings for the NHS

Introducing point of care (POC) testing in a primary care urgent care pathway

to improve clinical service delivery

Outpatient Clinic

Examination Room

To evaluate the decision-making process for urgent care conditions by introducing POC testing into the urgent care clinic pathway at a busy GP practice. By increasing diagnostic confidence, we aim to improve clinical decision making, patient experience and patient flow through primary and secondary care, leading to appropriate treatment and referrals.

Hospital Ward

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Summary

This real-world service evaluation explored the use of POC testing in clinical decision making within an urgent care pathway at a busy GP practice. The evaluation has shown that POC testing:

- Was used by all clinical roles involved in delivering the urgent care pathway
- Served to increase confidence in clinical decision making, and in providing additional information in cases of diagnostic uncertainty
- Helped to save (unnecessary) referrals to secondary care, as well as suggest a referral was appropriate where
 previously a referral may not have been made
- Can improve patient care and experience
- Has the potential to deliver net savings to the healthcare system

Background

Providing effective and timely healthcare in a primary care general practice (GP) setting is fundamental to managing the demands experienced in other areas of the national health service. In 2009, a report commissioned by the Department of Health entitled 'Urgent Care in General Practice' was disseminated to those within the profession. The report outlined potential strategies for primary care to adopt to meet the increasing demand for urgent care. Urgent care within this setting can avoid the additional pressures experienced by acute secondary care departments from hospital attendances and admissions.

During 2017, the Brookside Group Practice (Lower Earley, Reading) identified increasing demand on their routine and urgent care clinic appointments. As such, they introduced a new model for their urgent care clinic, transforming it from a GP service into a multidisciplinary team clinic to utilise the additional skill set from training grade and non-medical staff. This new model of care was rolled out across two of their sites (Chalfont surgery and Brookside surgery) and coincided with the upgrade of the practice website². The online presence allowed patients alternative access for their healthcare needs, in addition to telephone or face to face consultations. More information about Brookside Group Practice can be found in Appendix 1 at the end of this report.

¹ Royal College of General Practitioners. 2009

² Gowdy A. 2017

Figure 1 shows a schematic diagram of the original model of urgent care where the service was run solely by GP staff.

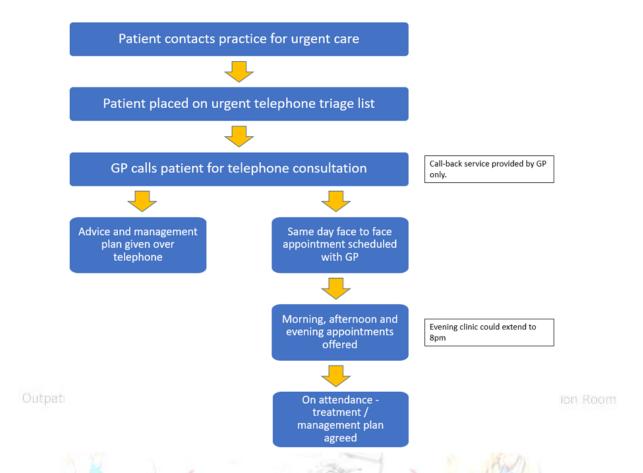


Figure 1: Original model of urgent care at Brookside Group Practice

Working alongside the Oxford Academic Health Science Network (Oxford AHSN), an audit and in-depth review was undertaken to assess the impact and benefits of a new urgent care clinic model.

The audit showed that the practice was able to offer a more dynamic service under the new model by providing appropriate clinical staffing to meet the demand for urgent appointments. The use of a multidisciplinary team was found to be effective in that almost half of patients seen by non-GP staff did not require supervisory GP input. Of those patients that did require supervisory input, it was observed to be predominantly for complex issues or prescriptions. This identified opportunities to increase the competencies of staff working in the urgent clinic.

The new model of urgent care, along with the upgraded website, showed a reduction in waiting times for routine appointments. The increased activity and better performance that the new model of urgent care provided enabled improved efficiencies and responsiveness to patients. Due to the flexible skill mix of staff within the multidisciplinary team for urgent care, the cost of the new model varied from between 4% to 38% lower than the previous model.

Figure 2 illustrates the new model of urgent care using a multidisciplinary team, including prescribing nurse, practice nurse, GP registrar, returning (to work) GP, specialist paramedic, paramedic and physician assistant.

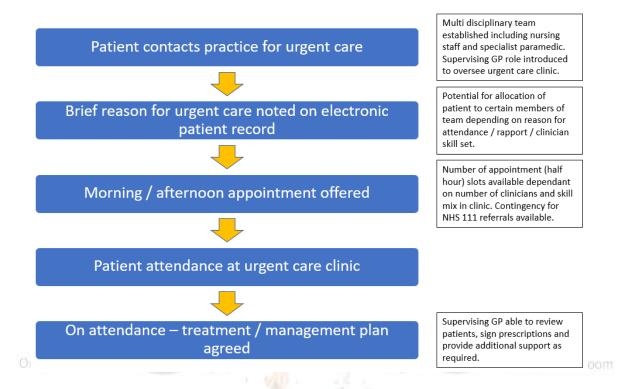


Figure 2: New model of urgent care at Brookside Group Practice

Introduction of Point of Care (POC) Testing

The audit also identified other areas for potential improvement in efficiencies within the urgent care clinic. This study has therefore investigated the introduction of POC testing within the urgent care pathway at Brookside Group Practice, with support from the Oxford AHSN Strategic and Industry Partnerships team.

A POC test can quickly provide additional information to support clinical decision making in cases of diagnostic uncertainty. With a traditional lab-based diagnostic test, a blood sample would be taken from the patient and transported to the pathology laboratories for appropriate testing to be conducted. Turn-around time for results from the laboratories can be as long as several days, depending on the labs' location, capacity and the type of testing required.

Oxford AHSN has previous experience of conducting POC service evaluations. A multi-site evaluation involving three paediatric emergency units within the Thames Valley region showed that near-patient testing can contribute to rapid decision-making on treatment and antibiotic prescriptions. The benefit of rapid patient assessment can result in improved speed of diagnosis and patient flow by reducing waiting times³.

³ McDonald C. 2017

A study using POC testing within the South-Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) evaluated the use of the tests as a front-line diagnostic in a frail elderly population. Testing as a risk-management tool allowed first responders to assess whether patients could remain at home or required transport to an acute or community setting for further treatment⁴.

A separate evaluation leading to implementation of POC testing in Emergency Multidisciplinary Units (EMUs) across several sites by Oxford University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, has led to standardisation of testing and reduced time to results, compared to replying on lab-based tests⁵.

Aims

This **service evaluation** was undertaken to investigate whether the introduction of POC testing in the urgent care clinic at Brookside Group Practice could:

- Provide support with the clinical decision-making in a range of urgent care needs
- Increase clinical confidence in the diagnosis of ailments seen within the urgent care clinic
- Lead to more appropriate patient referrals to secondary care, with indicative modelling of the resulting financial impact

Through the completion of a record form for each patient on whom a POC test was performed, it was established what the intended management plan would have been had POC testing not been available, and whether and how the results of POC testing changed that management plan.

Horizon Scanning

From a horizon scanning exercise to identify appropriate POC tests to evaluate, two platforms were selected; the HORIBA MicroSemi CRP and the Abbott iSTAT Alinity.

The **HORIBA Microsemi CRP** automated bench-top analyser was selected to measure full blood count (FBC), 17 clinical parameters and C-reactive protein (CRP), an acute phase protein elevated in response to inflammation. Whole blood EDTA samples were required for testing with results available in either 4 minutes (FBC+CRP) or 1 minute (FBC only).

The **Abbott iSTAT Alinity** hand-held analyser with selected cartridges

- CG4+: to measure abnormal lactate levels, monitoring tissue hypoxia and urea and electrolytes (U&E)
- CHEM8+: Detecting blood chemistry abnormalities, primarily renal function and dehydration

Heparinised whole blood samples were required for testing, with results available in approximately 2 minutes.

⁴ MacPherson M. 2018

⁵ Smith I. 2017



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Image 1: POCT analyser platforms used in the evaluation. HORIBA Microsemi CRP (left) and Abbott iSTAT Alinity (right)

Manufacturer	Test Analyser platform		Parameters tested	Use to evaluate		
HORIBA Outpat	CRP	Microsemi CRP	Full Blood Count (FBC) C-Reactive Protein (CRP)	Presence and severity of respiratory infection (bacterial or viral origin)		
Abbott	CHEM8+	iSTAT	Electrolytes and haemoglobin	Metabolic status and renal function		
Abbott	CG4+	iSTAT	Lactate and blood gasses	Heart failure / severe infection (sepsis)		

Table 1. Summary of the parameters measured on the two POCT analyser platforms during the evaluation

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POC Evaluation

The HORIBA Microsemi CRP analyser was provided on loan by HORIBA UK Limited, Northampton, England. The Abbott iSTAT Alinity (Abbott UK, Maidenhead, England) was loaned directly by Oxford AHSN. The reagents and cartridges used on both platforms during the evaluation were funded by Oxford AHSN.

The evaluation study at two sites within Brookside Group Practice (Brookside surgery and Chalfont surgery) was conducted between January 2019 and July 2019.

Prior to the introduction of POCT into the clinical pathway, training was provided on the use of both analysers and running of all tests, by authorised representatives of the respective manufacturer. During the evaluation, tests could be requested and run by any trained and competent clinical personnel involved in delivery of the urgent care pathway.

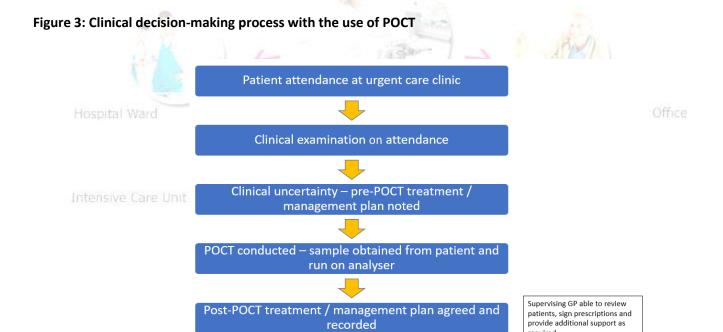
The HORIBA Microsemi CRP analyser was quality-controlled during the evaluation prior to each day of testing by the clinical staff using bi-level (high and low) quality control reagents.

The Abbott iSTAT Alinity performed internal electronic and calibration check during each test cycle. During the evaluation, a routine software system upgrade was conducted on the iSTAT Alinity, provided by lab staff from Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

The decision to run one or more POC tests was based on the clinical judgement of the patients' condition by the healthcare professional at the time of presentation. If there was uncertainty around the proposed management plan or if it was felt the test results could contribute to improved care of the patient, one or more tests could be conducted.

An individual patient study record form was completed contemporaneously with each POCT undertaken. The record form asked clinical staff to identify the care pathway that would have been chosen prior to administration of the POCT and to record the impact (if any) on that care pathway following availability of the POCT result.

Figure 3 shows a schematic representation of the clinical decision-making process with the use of POCT within the urgent care clinic across the practice.



Results

During the study period (January 2019 – July 2019), 133 separate POC tests were carried out on a total of 102 patients to assist with the clinical decision-making process (i.e. in some instances a patient had more than one POC test). To put this number of patients tested in context, a total of 7,580 patients attended the urgent care pathway during the period of the evaluation.

required.

Here follows an analysis of the results from the service evaluation conducted at Brookside Group Practice in the use of POC testing.

Analyser usage

In cases of diagnostic uncertainty, patients were tested using the most appropriate instrument and cartridge based on the decision of the medical professional. In some instances, more than one test was run. A total of 133 individual POC tests were carried out on 102 patients during the evaluation.

Table 2 shows the numerical count for use of each analyser, with figure 4 showing the representative proportions with further breakdown of cartridges.

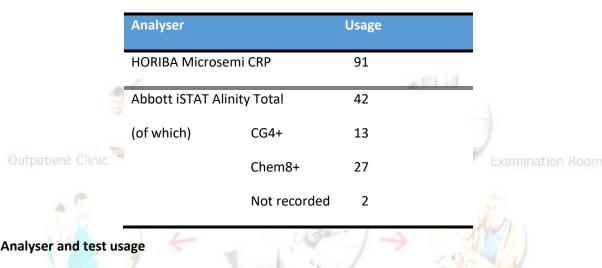


Table 2: Analyser and test usage

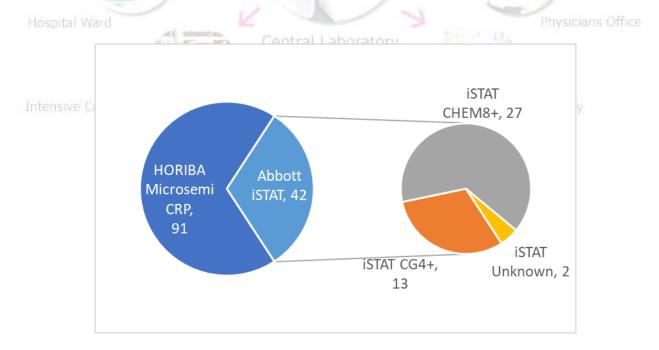


Figure 4: Proportional usage of analyser with cartridge differentiation

Figure 5 shows the use of POC test by clinical function during the evaluation, which illustrates the range of clinical roles involved in the delivery of the urgent care pathway

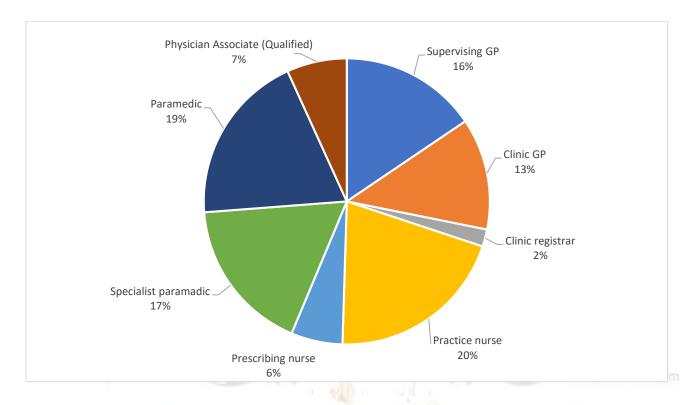


Figure 5: Use of POCT test by clinical role

Patient management

When a POC test was used, clinical staff recorded the intended patient management plan prior to the use of POC testing and again after having the additional diagnostic information from the POC test available. Analysis of these records was undertaken to determine on how many occasions the testing confirmed the original clinical thinking, and on how many occasions it changed clinical thinking.

Use of POC testing was found to have confirmed the original management plan on 57 of the 102 occasions it was used, and to have altered the management plan on 45 occasions.

Figure 6 shows the results of confirmed and changed management plans.

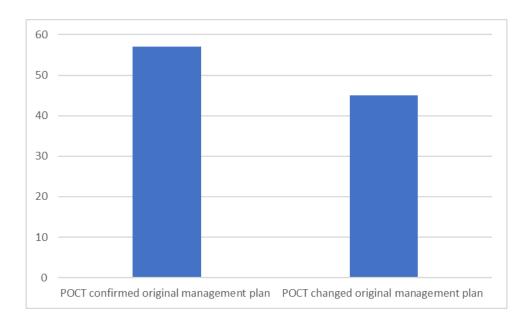


Figure 6: Patient management decisions following POC testing

Referral to secondary care

In some instances, a patient's condition could necessitate referral to secondary care for further investigation or treatment. The possibility of referral to secondary care occurred in 37 of the 102 instances when POC testing was used during the evaluation.

As well as confirming an initial plan to refer, POC testing also contributed to saved referrals (when a referral would originally have been requested) and possibly more importantly for patient care, lead to a referral being made or expedited based on the POC test result when previously it had not been considered.

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Figure 7 shows the occasions where POC testing influenced secondary care referrals.

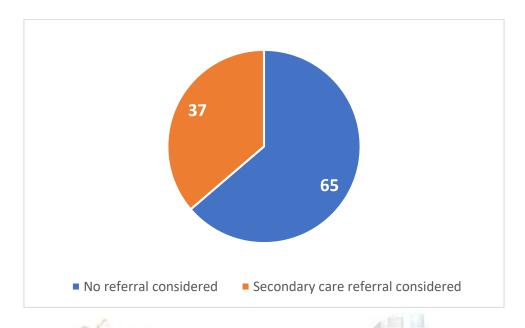


Figure 7: Occasions when POC testing influenced secondary care referrals

Outpatient Clinic Examination Room

Figure 8 illustrates how POC testing influenced secondary care referrals (37 of 102 patients tested)

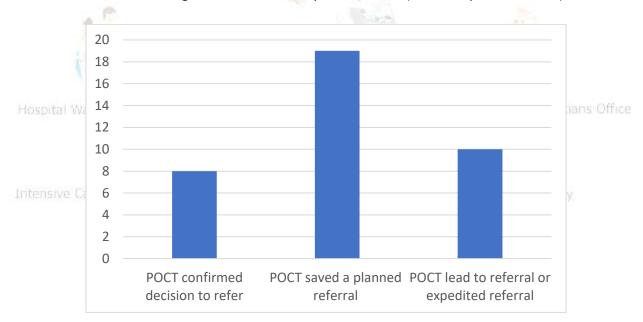


Figure 8: Influence of POC testing on secondary care referrals

Impact Analysis and Discussion

Despite being a relatively small study at ~100 patients, use of POC testing in the urgent care pathway at Brookside surgery has been shown to have a positive impact on clinical decision-making. Clinical staff reported increased confidence, both in reinforcing their initial diagnosis (56% of the occasions a POC test was used) and more importantly in providing additional clarity in cases of diagnostic uncertainty (44% of the occasions a POC test was used). It is important to note that POCT testing was used across all staff job roles involved in delivering the urgent care pathway, and use was not dominated by a single or small number or roles.

Importantly, the use of POC testing had a significant impact on secondary care referrals. In 8 of the 102 instances (8% of the time) where POC testing was used, the test helped confirm the healthcare professional's decision to refer the patient to secondary care, but more importantly POC testing helped save a referral to secondary care on 19 occasions (19% of the time) and helped the decision to make or secure a referral to secondary care on 10 occasions (10% of the time).

Saving an unnecessary referral will save the healthcare system the cost of the referral and free up capacity (and possibly an admission) in secondary care and means that the patient does not have to follow a pathway of (unnecessary) additional clinical visits and interventions within secondary care, as their treatment can be managed within primary care. Securing a secondary care referral, where previously there was no plan to refer, suggests that the patient will receive the most appropriate care for their condition and potentially sooner than they otherwise may have done had they remained "undiagnosed" within the primary care system. This outcome will result in the cost of the secondary care referral being incurred in the immediate term, but it may reduce longer term costs in both primary and secondary care (and possibly deterioration of the patient's health) if the patient were to remain in primary care seeking an ongoing diagnosis. Not only could this mean a lower overall cost to the system, but the patient receiving better care sooner and having an improved overall experience of the healthcare system.

Anecdotally, healthcare professionals involved in the evaluation reported that the availability of a POC test result allowed them to have a more meaningful or specific discussion with the patient about the diagnosis being made and that patients tended to accept the result of a test more readily than the clinical opinion of the medical professional alone. In a small number of instances where a secondary care referral was avoided, it was reported that the patients were immensely relieved and pleased not to have to go to hospital, an outcome they were dreading, as they could be treated at home. Furthermore, a previous study has demonstrated that CRP POC testing in a defined clinical population is a useful tool to optimise antimicrobial prescribing in primary care. In this study, a clear shift was seen towards either no prescribing or backup prescribing after testing⁷.

^{7.} Ward C (2018).

POC testing was used on 102 patients during the evaluation compared to a total of 7,580 patients that attended the urgent care clinic during the same period. This evaluation has shown that the use of POC testing can make a valuable contribution to the diagnosis of a patient's condition, so why therefore was POC testing not used more widely or the 100 or so patients tested over a shorter period?

It is important to remember that use of a POC test was at the discretion of the healthcare professional, and only in instances where there was diagnostic uncertainty; not all patients would require a POC test to be run to assist in the diagnosis of their condition. Furthermore, as this was a service evaluation, use of POC testing had not been standardised within the urgent care pathway and not all healthcare professionals had been trained in the use of POC testing. Similarly, the trial was run over two geographically separate clinics, and in the case of the Abbott iSTAT which is a portable device, was also used in the community, so the POC analysers were not necessarily always available for use in all possible occasions.

Indicative economic analysis for reduced secondary care referrals by using POC testing

The use of the POC testing at Brookside clinic over the six-month trial period aimed to evaluate its effectiveness on the overall care of patients and to consider the financial impact of its use. Despite the relatively small data set, the financial impact of introducing POC testing into the urgent care pathway at Brookside Clinic has been modelled to give an indication of the potential value of POC testing to the service.

This data gathered has shown that if the POC test was not available, 19% of 102 patients (19) extra patients would have been referred to secondary care (figure 8). The tests removed the need for these patients to be referred to an acute hospital. However, the POC test result also resulted in expedited secondary care referral for 10 patients (10%) who required further treatment.

During the 6-month period of the trial, a total of 7,580 patients used the Brookside urgent care pathway. This figure is later used to scale the impact of POC testing to a full year, with assumptions then made about levels of adoption of POC testing within the urgent care pathway.

In this analysis, we are considering only the reduction in the secondary care referrals when POC testing was used in primary care to support diagnostic decision making.

Input cost

The resources required for the analysis are the cost of the HORIBA Microsemi CRP and Abbott iSTAT Alinity analysers, cost of the HORIBA Microsemi CRP and Abbott iSTAT tests cartridges and example costs of secondary care referrals and admissions. Capital acquisition costs and costs of the cartridges, based on assumed usage rates, have been supplied by both manufacturers. To avoid disclosing individual prices, blended costs are presented in this model.

Equipment Cost	Cost
Cost of analysers	£5,300
Average cost per POC test (based on mix of	
cartridges used in the evaluation, Figure 4)	£10.45
Average test cost per patient tested	
(133 POC tests run on 102 patients)	£13.90

Table 3: Cost of the analysers and tests (indicative costs provided by the manufacturers)

### ### ### ##########################				
Activity				
Secondary care referral cost \$\$	£170			
Secondary care admission costs ^{ff}				
Diagnostic Examination of Upper Respiratory Tract and Upper Gastrointestinal Tract	£1,337			
Kidney or Urinary Tract Infections, with Interventions, with CC Score 0-2	£603			
Sepsis without Interventions, with CC Score 0-4	£587			
ED admission	£252			
Blended admission costs	£695			

Table 4: Calculation of emergency admission cost used in economic model

\$\$ An indicative cost of a secondary care referral is reported as £170 8

££ The costs of the secondary care admissions for the model are taken from the NHS reference costs 2019/20. It is not known what type nor how many admissions were avoided or required, so an arithmetic mean of the above admission costs has been used for indicative modelling.

⁸ Livingstone J (2015)

Results

This indicative economic model is based on reduced admissions of 19 out of 102 patients tested by POC testing over a 6-month period. In this model, the assumption is made that all referrals would have incurred the referral cost and that 50% of the referrals would have resulted in an admission. Table 5 below shows the results of the cost analysis model for this patient population, resulting in a near cost-neutral model.

Data as Provided (102 patients)				
Total Patients on who POC testing was used	102			
Reduced patient referrals when POC testing was used	19			
Percentage of referrals saved	19%			
A-Cost savings due to POC testing (reduced referrals and admissions)	£9,830			
B-Total cost of using POC testing (cost of analysers plus cartridges used)	£6,717			
Total Cost savings from reduced secondary referrals form 102 patients (A-B)				

Table 5: Cost analysis from reduced secondary referrals for the trial period

The cost of the additional secondary care referrals seen in this study have not been modelled as there is no analysis to say what the patient's treatment pathway would have been had the POC testing not been performed and the referral not been made.

Sensitivity analysis

This hypothetical model is sensitive to the number of referrals and admissions to secondary care that were avoided. Reduced numbers of referrals have a big impact on the model. The 102 patients on whom POC testing was used during the evaluation comprised 1.3% of the 7,580-patient population who used the urgent care service during the same period, and the use of POC testing led to a reduction in secondary care referrals of 19% of those patients tested.

As previously discussed, POC testing was used on a relatively low number of patients compared to the total number of patients that used the urgent care service. The sensitivity analysis in table 6 below, shows that if POC testing was used on an assumed 2.5% of a total population of 15,160 patients in 1 year (scaling from 7,580- patients in a 6-month period), 379 patients would have been tested and a reduction of 72 secondary care referrals may have been achieved. The reduced referrals from primary care in this example may result in cost saving of £26,683 to the system annually.

Annual Projection (Assumption - 2.5%)	
Patients cohort for a year	15,160
POCT was used on 2.5% of the cohort (total no of patients tested)	379
Possible reduced patient referral	72
A-Possible secondary care cost savings due to POC testing	£37,251
B-Total cost of the POC testing in urgent care pathway	£10,568
Total Cost savings from 72 reduced secondary referrals	£26,683

Table 6: Cost saving from reduced secondary referrals when 2.5% of annual patient cohort tested

The sensitivity analysis in the table 7, below indicates that if the POC testing was used on an assumed 5% of the total population of 15,160 patients in 1 year, 758 patients would have been tested and a reduction of 144 secondary care referrals may have been achieved. The reduced referrals in this example may result in cost saving of £60,056 to the system annually.

Annual Projection (Assumption - 5%)	1
Patients cohort for a year	15,160
POCT was used on 5% of the cohort (total no of patients tested)	758
Possible reduced patient referral	144
A-Possible cost savings due to POC testing	£75,892
B-Total cost of the POC testing	£15,836
Total Cost savings from 144 reduced secondary care referrals	£60,056

with the manufacturers for care of their respective analyser, etc. should be anticipated.

Examination Room

Physicians Office

Table 7: Cost saving from reduced secondary referrals when 5% of annual patient cohort tested

Indicative Economic Analysis - Discussion

An increased reduction in secondary care admissions is the biggest factor driving the cost-effectiveness of POC testing, but the patient level data does not record the type of admissions that were avoided because of the use of POC testing. To mitigate for this uncertainty, NHS reference costs were for the most likely admission types, and the UK mean cost per intervention was used. Again, it was not known how many secondary care referrals may have led to an admission, so a figure of 50% has been assumed. Ongoing equipment costs e.g. analyser rental, service and maintenance contracts

Central Laboratory

A conservative approach to the analysis suggests that the use of the POC testing in the urgent care pathway may have delivered a slight cost saving of just over £3,000 due to the reduced patient referrals to secondary care for 19 patients for whom secondary care referral was avoided.

The sensitivity analysis demonstrates that an increased cost saving may result when adoption of POC testing becomes more widespread across the urgent care service, with indicative levels of 2.5% and the 5% of the total patient cohort being tested used for modelling purposes. Reducing the avoidable referral of patients to secondary care may not only result in cost saving, it also allows better access for those where care is truly needed. It may be concluded that the POC testing in Primary Care offers good value for money for the NHS and an improvement in patient outcomes.

Conclusion

This real-world evaluation of POC testing at Brookside Group Practices has shown the value of POC testing in an urgent care pathway in a primary care setting. The use of POC testing can help to increase diagnostic confidence and to improve clinical decision making in cases of diagnostic uncertainty and to help improve the patient experience.

POC testing was seen to help avoid making a secondary care referral for 19 of the patients it was used on (19% of those tested) and led to a secondary care referral being made for 10 patients (10% of those tested), suggesting that those patients received improved care than had the POC testing not been used. In both instances, an overall cost outpatient Clinic saving to the healthcare system can be envisioned and patient experience and care are both improved, as a more appropriate course of action is being taken sooner, than if the POC test had not been available.

The adoption of POC testing in an urgent care pathway such as that followed at the Brookside Practice is recommended, as it offers the possibility to increase confidence in clinical decision making, to improve patient Hospital Ward experience and outcomes and the potential to save the system money overall.

Intensive Care Unit

Pharmacy

Appendix 1 – Brookside Group Practice

Brookside Group Practice is a well-established and progressive three-site teaching GP practice in West Berkshire that has been in operation since 1977. The Practice rapidly expanded during the 1970s and 1980s but now has a relatively static population size of approximately 27,000 patients.

The practice employs around 130 staff across several disciplines, including doctors, practice nurses, healthcare assistants, patient services and support staff, smoking cessation advisors, paramedics, pharmacists, physician associates and physician associate students. The overarching aim of the practice is to provide a high standard of healthcare by making appropriate and innovative use of limited NHS resources.

<u>Appendix 2 – Data Capture Form</u>

Your role in clinic: Your initials:	Supervising Practice Nur		Clinic G	Р	Clinic R	egistrar		Prescribi	ing Nurse	
	Practice Nur	se	_							
			Parame	dic	Special	ist Paramedic		•	n Associate d / Student	on Room
Did the POC results change the management plan?	referral to				or	Yes: different prescription			•	
been available, what would you	patient but with more	blood	test in	appoin within	ntment	Refer to secondary care	to mana	agemen	Refer to another agency (please specify)	ns Office
c n	hange the nanagement plan? FPOC test had not been available, what would you	hange the referral to secondary control of POC test had not leen available, what would you with more risk referral to secondary control of POC test had not leen available, with more risk	hange the referral to secondary care F POC test had not leen available, patient but with more surge vave done? risk	hange the referral to secondary care more secondary care F POC test had not leen available, patient but with more surgery risk more more secondary care	hange the referral to secondary care more tests F POC test had not leen available, what would you with more risk more tests Arrange blood test in appoin surgery within surgery surgery	hange the referral to secondary care more tests F POC test had not leen available, patient but with more wave done? risk more tests Arrange GP appointment within surgery	hange the nanagement plan? FOC test had not leen available, what would you lave done? referral to more tests prescription Manage hange blood test in surgery within surgery more tests prescription Arrange GP appointment within surgery appointment within surgery	hange the referral to secondary care prescription F POC test had not leen available, patient but what would you with more risk prescription Arrange GP appointment secondary to within surgery within surgery t plant to secondary to manage the patient but within surgery to plant to secondary to manage the patient but within surgery to plant to plant to plant to the patient but within surgery to plant to pl	hange the referral to secondary care more tests prescription original to secondary care processed and not seen available, what would you with more surgery within surgery within surgery to managemen to plane.	hange the nanagement plan? FOC test had not leen available, patient but leave done? what would you leave are referral to secondary care referral to secondary care referral to secondary care referral to secondary leave done? Manage Arrange GP appointment leave within surgery within surgery risk refer to secondary leave done? Refer to secondary to another agency leave to managemen leave great to secondary leave lea

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