When COVID-19 struck, NSW Health moved swiftly to protect from the pandemic 7.5 million residents of NSW and the 150,000 staff members who care for them.

Central to this mammoth effort was a digital triage screening tool, which was built and rapidly deployed within electronic medical record (EMR) systems across the state from 24 January – the day before the first Australian case of coronavirus was confirmed in Victoria.

The first of its kind in Australia, NSW Health’s digital triage tool has helped patients to get quicker diagnoses and treatment, bolstering efforts to fight a deadly virus which has infected more than 11.7 million people globally to date.

As the acute response to COVID-19 has evolved over the past five months, so too has NSW Health’s EMR COVID-19 Assessment Tool, otherwise known as eCAT.

Developed with input from the Ministry of Health’s Public Health Emergency Operations Centre and the Agency for Clinical Innovation’s Emergency Care Institute, eCAT supports clinicians with screening questions, alerts and a list of patients who are either confirmed or suspected of having coronavirus.

Every second day eHealth NSW collaborates with local health districts (LHDs) and specialty health networks (SHNs) to enhance the way in which eCAT supports triage and assessments in
Around the world, COVID-19 has wreaked untold damage while highlighting the immense power and resilience of humankind. NSW Health’s ability to come together, working as one organisation and one system, has enabled rapid decision-making – helping us to ensure rapid delivery when the people of NSW needed it most.

Initiatives that might have taken months or years to achieve – such as the dramatic uptake of telehealth consultations – scaled up in a matter of days and weeks.

Certainly, the tools and systems eHealth NSW has developed over the past decade, and which we support 24/7, came into their own when coronavirus began creating unprecedented challenges.

COVID-19 has accentuated the power of working in partnership with our colleagues not just in NSW Health but those across in other jurisdictions and in other state government clusters.

I have been impressed at how quickly we have all been able to respond together and am extremely proud of our collective effort to keep our health system safe.

In this special COVID-19 edition of eHealth NSW News, we explore how our work has supported Australia’s largest public health system as it deals with a pandemic that has so far infected more than 11.7 million people globally and, in doing so, defined 2020.

All of these digital health tools, of course, needed a solid foundation in the form of state-of-the-art infrastructure on which to be rapidly rolled out. And certainly, the investments and hard work we’ve put into digitising NSW Health over the previous six years have paid off.

Having built consistent foundations to support horizons 2 and 3 of the eHealth Strategy for NSW Health: 2016-26, this groundwork is standing us in excellent stead as we prepare for a new way of caring for patients in a post-coronavirus world.

It’s fantastic to see the continued effort and accomplishments of eHealth NSW staff and I’m reminded daily of what talented and dedicated teams we work with across NSW Health.

To everyone who has worked so hard for the greater good during this pandemic, thank you for putting patients at the heart of everything you do.

Dr Zoran Bolevich
Chief Executive, eHealth NSW
Chief Information Officer, NSW Health

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emergency departments and inpatient wards. Chief Information Officers and LHD/SHN technical teams are also involved.

Such a collaborative effort to design, build and deploy a digital triage tool at speed helped to support NSW Health’s response to COVID-19, said Sophie Tyner, Director of the Ministry of Health’s Office of the Chief Health Officer.

“This is a wonderful example of NSW Health agencies working together very rapidly to adapt existing systems to respond to a rapidly evolving situation,” Ms Tyner said.

All LHDs with Cerner EMRs are now using the key screening and assessment components of eCAT, with an increasing number using the COVID-19 patient list.

eHealth NSW is designing a detailed COVID-19 consultation workflow which will enable clinicians to undertake more detailed assessment and management plans for patients.

Given NSW’s success with flattening the curve, and a decreasing number of COVID-19 patients now being treated in its public hospitals, the focus has turned to outpatient and community-based care.

Supporting this work is a group of Chief Clinical Information Officers plus representatives of the State Forms Committee and the State Health Emergency Operations Centre, who together are ensuring EMR workflows reflect changes to policies and guidelines triggered by COVID-19.
With COVID-19 sparking unprecedented demand for virtual care, eHealth NSW is joining forces with NSW Health partners and consumers to extend this model of care into even more settings over the next five years.

This is likely to come as great news for patients, who, according to a May 2020 survey by the Consumers Health Forum, are overwhelmingly in favour of telehealth consultations.

A new unit called the Virtual Care Accelerator is working with NSW Health partners to ensure patients have full access to the best that telehealth-enabled models of care and remote monitoring have to offer – both during the acute response to COVID-19 and beyond.

“Virtual care is fast becoming business-as-usual for NSW Health,” said Dr Shannon Nott, Clinical Director of the Virtual Care Accelerator.

“The Accelerator is all about taking the COVID-related demand for virtual care and future-proofing it so that patients see long-term benefits from the investments being made.”

And so, building on initiatives underway before and in response to COVID-19, eHealth NSW and key partners will focus over the next 12 months on embedding system-wide, high-value models of virtual care.

These models will be supported by advances in technology to personalise patients’ healthcare, improve health outcomes and promote clinical collaboration across Australia’s largest public health system.

NSW Health has a strong track record of innovating in the virtual care space, with many local health districts having run successful programs for well over a decade, Dr Nott said.

“What COVID-19 has done has proven beyond a doubt the worth of virtual care,” he said. “We want to build on this foundation to ensure it continues to improve outcomes for patients and families.

“We want to enable our system to utilise advances in technology which will enable our clinicians to develop models of care that support the challenges we face as a health system. It’s all about ensuring we truly place patients at the centre of care.”

Spreading virtual care models beyond the acute space and into community settings is another focus.

“Doing this will bolster primary care capacity across NSW and enable us to work across the system to better collaborate for the benefit of our patients,” said Dr Nott, adding consumer representatives will play an important part developing and driving models of care.

Importantly, these virtual care models and technology have huge potential to bolster hospitals’ capacity through enabling remote monitoring to take place in community and home settings.

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Guarding those at increased risk of COVID-19

Almost 15,000 western Sydney residents with an increased risk of contracting coronavirus have been identified and given personalised and proactive strategies to help keep them safe, thanks to an initiative that could be scaled across the state.

Using electronic medical record (EMR) data from Westmead, Blacktown, Mount Druitt and Auburn Hospitals’ emergency departments between 2017 and 2019, Western Sydney Local Health District (LHD) and eHealth NSW’s Data and Analytics Portfolio pinpointed patients whose pre-existing conditions put them at high risk of contracting COVID-19.

“Local knowledge and insights from EMR data helped us to identify and take care of people facing a high risk of bad outcomes,” said Dr Amith Shetty, an emergency department physician at Westmead Hospital and Clinical Director of Patient Experience and System Performance Support, Ministry of Health.

Using at-risk criteria based on international literature, some 14,702 patients with conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, respiratory disease, kidney disease and recent cancer diagnoses were flagged as high-risk.

The analysis allowed Western Sydney LHD to implement personalised and proactive health management strategies to minimise these people’s exposure to the pandemic, which to date has infected more than 9 million people globally.

This formed part of a community-based management plan to mitigate individual risks through direct follow-up with the patients.

These strategies included additional health advice for Aboriginal patients post discharge, and specific SMS messaging for cardiology and endocrinology patients about ways in which to stay safe from COVID-19.

eHealth NSW Senior Data Scientist Dr Mostafa Shaikh said the data flagged 33 medical conditions, enabling clinicians to define their own at-risk patient cohorts by combining conditions such as type 1 diabetes with hypertension and asthma.

“This meant clinicians could easily identify ahead of time the patients that they would monitor for increased risk of contraction based on learnings from previous patients with similar conditions,” said Dr Shaikh.

“Due to the success of this initiative, eHealth NSW is investigating the potential for scaling it across NSW Health.”

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The Virtual Care Accelerator will support advancements in health provision across a variety of priority areas including supporting residential aged care facilities, managing both COVID-positive patients and patients with complex health care needs in their homes and providing them with the option to visit specialists virtually.

This Virtual Care Accelerator unit will also seek to ensure clinicians have access to the tools they need to provide virtual healthcare.

These include e-Prescriptions, enhancements to the electronic medical record as well as introducing new technologies such as advances in cameras, monitoring devices and apps to better enable the monitoring of patients in the home and/or hospital, said Dr Nott.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, eHealth NSW was already enhancing virtual care via a number of initiatives including myVirtualCare, a clinical waiting room and video-consultation platform now being rolled out across NSW Health.

Initiatives such as myVirtualCare, developed in partnership with the Agency for Clinical Innovation and local health districts and specialty health networks, will greatly benefit NSW citizens, particularly those in rural and regional areas, said Dr Nott.
NSW Health staff collaborating remotely in record numbers

eHealth NSW is giving more NSW Health staff than ever before the telehealth and screen-sharing technology they need to provide patient care safely, collaboratively and remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

eHealth NSW has enabled the entire NSW Health workforce with Microsoft Teams and Skype for Business. This is more than triple that of the 34,000 staff members enabled in mid-March, at the start of the acute response to COVID-19.

Almost half a million direct person-to-person calls took place in April 2020 compared with 20,000 in April 2019. More than 275,000 virtual meetings were conducted between a total of 1 million attendees in April 2020, compared with 18,000 meetings between 66,000 attendees in April 2019.

This access is helping the local health districts (LHDs) and specialty health networks which comprise Australia’s largest public health system to comply with the NSW Government’s directive for clinicians and administrative staff to work remotely wherever possible.

“Enabling clinicians with telehealth and unified communications has never been more important or more powerful,” said Jason Matthews, Manager of eHealth NSW’s Conference, Collaboration and Wireless Program.

“What it’s doing is enabling NSW Health staff to work and collaborate remotely and safely, which during a global pandemic has never been more crucial.”

To support the surge in demand for effective remote collaboration, more than 140,000 NSW Health staff have been enabled with Microsoft Teams.

“We have leveraged our Amazon Web Services environment to scale out our Pexip capacity and that has allowed us to meet the extra demand for conferencing services,” said Farhoud Salimi, Executive Director, Service Delivery, eHealth NSW.

“This is helping to keep NSW Health staff safe yet connected as they continue to deliver healthcare to the people of NSW at this extraordinary time.”

Ensuring clinical care

At Northern Sydney and Central Coast Local Health Districts (LHDs), its entire workforce of 21,000 staff members are enabled with Skype for Business – more than twice as many as in mid-March.

“This has been hugely useful as it’s meant that clinicians who have needed to self-isolate but are still able to work have been able to participate in clinical care, for example in multi-disciplinary team meetings. It’s hugely important to ensure all able clinicians can provide care at this time,” said Michael Bishop, Acting ICT Director at these LHDs.

“The clinicians are thrilled with the service eHealth NSW has provided and how it’s supporting their workflows. We are also delighted with how quickly the Skype and Pexip teams have supported service on-boarding in response to COVID-19. eHealth NSW’s Skype team were on site within a week of our call.”

Mr Bishop said Northern Sydney and Central Coast LHDs were keen to continue expanding their capacity for and uptake of telehealth-enabled care in collaboration with eHealth NSW, which partners with LHDs to drive the digital transformation of Australia’s largest public health system.
Full stream ahead!

Despite the social isolation enforced by COVID-19, patients and guests at hospitals in Western NSW Local Health District are now more connected than ever.

In the state’s west, 33 new facilities, including Wellington Hospital and Bathurst Health Service, have been enabled with secure wireless internet (Wi-Fi) since the outbreak of COVID-19.

In response to the pandemic, eHealth NSW accelerated its Wi-Fi roll-out across NSW Health, adding an extra 42 sites to the 229 it had already connected over the past four years.

This means that since February, eHealth NSW has helped 70,000 patients and visitors at 271 public hospitals to enjoy respite from the COVID-19 crisis in the form of Wi-Fi-enabled entertainment.

The Wi-Fi service has facilitated over 800,000 unique interactions, or almost 9,000 Wi-Fi sessions every day. These sessions included video calls, music and movie streaming and access to social media, all delivered through appropriate privacy internet filters.

Patients and visitors aren’t the only ones benefiting from greater connectivity, with visitors to many of NSW Health’s corporate facilities and NSW Ambulance stations now having access to Guest Wi-Fi.

The secure Patient and Guest Wi-Fi roll-out was enabled by eHealth NSW and made possible by the continued investment in core infrastructure, in particular the Health Wide Area Network.

Enabling top clinical information access during COVID-19

Frontline clinicians across NSW Health are being supported with fast and easy access to the best and most up-to-the-minute information and resources regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

In collaboration with clinicians, eHealth NSW developed the COVID-19 Guide – a one-stop resource providing access to world-leading medical institutions, journals, and prebuilt expert database searches.

The guide also includes information from the NSW and federal governments and their agencies, as well as advice from the World Health Organization.

Available on the Clinical Information Access Portal (CIAP) homepage, the COVID-19 Guide is among the top-five most popular pages on CIAP, with more than 18,000 individual page views since it launched on 11 March.

“The aim of CIAP since its inception more than 20 years ago has been to provide clinicians with the best evidence to support clinical care,” said Dr Roger Traill, Senior Anaesthetist at Sydney’s Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, who founded CIAP in 1998.

“A critical factor in this has been the direct relationship between the clinicians and the Knowledge Management Reference Group which oversees CIAP. The COVID-19 Guide is the latest in a long line of collaborations between CIAP and clinicians to provide cutting-edge information to help provide the best possible care to our patients.”

Clinicians can contact the CIAP 24/7 helpdesk by phoning 1800 824 279 or lodging a ticket at the CIAP website at www.ciap.health.nsw.gov.au
Saving lives and improving post-stroke outcomes, Telestroke is being hailed as a model for care during COVID-19 and beyond in its use of telehealth technology to virtually assess and treat stroke patients in regional and rural NSW.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Telestroke is being used to even greater effect, given that stroke specialists don’t need to be in the same room as their patients, ensuring social distancing.

COVID-19 struck just as the Telestroke state-wide service was poised to launch from its new headquarters at Prince of Wales Hospital (POWH) in Sydney’s east.

Despite the outbreak of the global pandemic, the Telestroke service has continued to spread this life-saving model of hyper-acute care to hospitals in Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour on the mid north coast.

“Telestroke is a model for COVID-19 care and beyond, as it’s all about bringing better outcomes for stroke patients,” said Professor Ken Butcher, Medical Director of the NSW Telestroke Service and Director of Clinical Neuroscience at the University of NSW.

“The outbreak of COVID-19 got us thinking that this type of technology would be invaluable should NSW Health’s medical workforce be severely affected by coronavirus.

“If, for example, stroke specialists had to self-isolate but were well enough to work, they could still deliver care to patients of stroke, which – COVID or no COVID – is always going to be a critical issue.”

Every year, around 19,000 residents of NSW have a stroke. NSW is home to 12 of Australia’s top-20 hotspots for stroke incidence, and 10 of these 12 are in regional and rural areas.

To deliver time-critical care, Telstroke links city-based specialists with people presenting with stroke symptoms to rural and regional health facilities, providing equity of access to stroke specialists, diagnosis and treatment.

Using screen-sharing technology provided by eHealth NSW, remote specialists gain full access to world-class patient imaging as it is being processed – allowing time-critical diagnosis and immediate treatment of stroke patients.

This means that if a patient in Port Macquarie has a stroke, they can be assessed by city-based stroke specialists using Telestroke kiosks equipped with high-definition cameras and audio devices and linked to NSW Health’s electronic medical record systems.

“The efforts to fight COVID-19 have taken over for the time being but we are pushing ahead with plans to get Telestroke established in hospitals in Shoalhaven, Lismore, Tamworth, Dubbo, Orange, Wagga Wagga, Griffith, Nepean, Bathurst, Armidale, Manning and Tweed,” said Professor Butcher.

“Afther that we will go into Moree, Blue Mountains, Lithgow, Grafton, Broken Hill and Deniliquin Hospitals.”

The Telestroke model of care was originally developed by the Agency for Clinical Innovation with the support of eHealth NSW and clinicians from Hunter New England, Mid North Coast and Central Coast Local Health Districts.
Young patients say yes please to more screen time

Tech-savvy patients being treated in and by Sydney’s children’s hospitals are embracing the shift towards telehealth models of care, jumping at the chance for more screen time with clinicians who are only too pleased to provide it.

Strict social distancing rules sparked a 154 per cent increase in telehealth models of care being delivered at Sydney Children’s Hospital, Randwick (SCH) and The Children’s Hospital at Westmead (CHW) since the outbreak of COVID-19.

With more than 100 departments and services set up for telehealth across both hospitals, face-to-face consultations are now being provided virtually – in many cases for the first time – by leveraging eHealth NSW’s infrastructure.

This is being done to great effect in the palliative care and chronic pain unit, where a play clinic enabling patients and families to connect, socialise and have fun is now taking place online, contributing to a 12-fold increase in demand for virtual meeting rooms.

“With precautions in place to protect our most vulnerable patients, we can’t invite them to the hospital at the moment or risk their health in any way,” said Senior Child Life Therapist Kirsty-Leah Goymour.

“To stay connected, we’ve created a virtual play clinic which is operating via Pexip. From the hospital to their homes, we offer play opportunities, read stories, sing and support each other.

“The families are excited we can stay in touch, and this has actually presented new opportunities for families who couldn’t attend in person previously because of distance and location.”

Children with difficult-to-treat asthma and cystic fibrosis, meanwhile, are being protected given their heightened vulnerability to COVID-19.

To minimise the risk that they contract the severe respiratory illness from someone within the community, the respiratory team at SCH has identified patients to undertake ‘home spirometry’ to measure their lung function.

Spiro Home devices are compatible with smartphones, enabling clinicians to determine via Bluetooth if a patient’s lung function has declined or if their treatment therapy is working.

“Being able to access this device during the pandemic is supporting the management of their chronic respiratory condition and making a long-term positive difference to the lives of these children and their families and keep them closer to home,” said Professor Adam Jaffe, Head of Respiratory at SCH.

At The Children’s Hospital at Westmead, occupational therapist Emma Cowley said telehealth has enabled a large multidisciplinary clinic to stay connected, complete regular team meetings and offer its families the flexibility to attend clinical appointments while adhering to social distancing.

“I am confident that even when COVID-19 restrictions have passed we will be using telehealth a lot more in our clinical practice,” said Ms Cowley.

Experts in departments like neurology, neurosurgery, nephrology, genetics and child development are also using the benefits of telehealth to connect and support children and families remotely.
A vital way of keeping clinicians across new and evolving areas of medicine, grand rounds take place weekly across all NSW public hospitals to support high-quality patient care.

However, strict social distancing enforced by the COVID-19 global pandemic has meant that holding these grand rounds has proved challenging.

On one hand, educating clinicians has never been more critical as they band together to fight a new strain of coronavirus not previously identified in humans.

On the other, endangering large groups of clinicians by placing them in close physical proximity poses a huge risk, especially in regional areas where specialists are in short supply.

At Newcastle’s John Hunter Hospital, a solution to hold virtual grand rounds was soon found, leveraging the infrastructure and technology of eHealth NSW.

“These grand rounds are an opportunity for clinicians to hear from their peers on medical education and information so they are all up to speed, and that has fantastic outcomes for patient care,” said Leanne Johnson, A/General Manager of John Hunter Hospital.

“Once COVID-19 put an end to grand rounds taking place as usual here at the hospital, we realised the platform we wanted to use would only take a maximum of 300 people, which was not going to cut it for a hospital campus of nearly 5000 staff.”

Led by Chris Mitchell, the ICT team at Hunter New England Local Health District teamed up with eHealth NSW to implement Skype for Business Broadcast – allowing grand rounds to be broadcast safely and securely to a clinical workforce hungry for the latest information on COVID-19.

Skype for Business Broadcast has also been used to great effect by John Hunter’s General Manager Leanne Johnson, who said four all-staff video updates have taken place virtually, each of them watched by between 800 and 1800 people.

“The response has been overwhelmingly positive,” said Ms Johnson. “At no other time in the hospital’s nearly 30-year history have we been able to connect with so many staff so quickly and easily, and at such an important time when it comes to communicating about COVID-19.”

Staff are being provided with updates on infection control, personal protective equipment (PPE) usage and availability, as well as ways in which to keep themselves safe and protect their wellbeing.

“We even had an expert to show the staff some yoga poses,” said Ms Johnson. “For us it’s all about caring for the carers and using this technology to connect and engage with our staff at what has been an unsettling time for many people.”

Skype for Business Broadcast is being extended to other local health districts and NSW Health entities, including South Eastern Sydney LHD.
Supporting excellent patient care – whatever happens

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for health systems globally to be prepared for the worst – and fast.

Since 2016 eHealth NSW has worked on a major project to improve the reliability and availability of clinical systems for the benefit of NSW Health clinicians and the patients for whom they care.

A central part of this project involved implementing disaster recovery environments across public hospitals and health services using the Cerner electronic medical record (EMR). EMRs allow clinicians to store, capture and access patient health information in acute and ambulatory care settings.

Most recently, eHealth NSW launched this 'as-a-service' disaster recovery offering at Sydney Children’s Hospitals Network.

Importantly, it minimises any impact to patient care should EMR production environments go down for an extended period of time due to a catastrophic event such as an earthquake or a flood.

“This project has been four years in the making,” said Munirrih Mahabat, Project Manager of eHealth NSW’s eCARI (Expansion of Clinical Applications Reliability Improvement) Program.

“Its ultimate goal that if there is a critical outage, the disaster recovery environment ensures clinicians are able to continue their processes and procedures as normal with minimal disruptions and without needing to revert to paper/manual processes for an extended period of time.”

Another part of the project involved migrating production and non-production EMR domains to the highly secure NSW Government Data Centres (GovDCs).

This has seen transaction speeds for the EMR production environments become significantly faster – resulting in monthly EMR transactions surging to 40 million from 24 million.

The upshot is that clinicians are getting much faster and more secure access to patient data. At SCHN, for example, the move has seen its EMR ranking in the Cerner ‘Lights On’ network climb from 115 to among the top-10 in the world.

Michael Dickinson, Director of Clinical Integration at SCHN, said: “Our EMR migration into GovDC was successfully and safely completed as a result of an outstanding level of collaboration between team members from eHealth NSW, SCHN and Cerner.

“The collaboration and openness between the teams led to positive outcomes, defining crucial roles and responsibilities to streamline ‘business as usual’ and critical incident management processes post implementation.”

Reaching Australia’s second-largest workforce via SMS

eHealth NSW has enabled NSW Health to send short message service (SMS) notifications for the first time to all 173,000 of its staff members in all four corners of the state.

Further technology developments are enabling NSW Health to have instant, two-way communication with its entire workforce via its COVID-19 Health Check (Outreach and Self-Report) emails and SMSs, which seek information from staff on COVID-related health questions.

Given the strong focus on patient care, especially amid the acute response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, not all NSW Health staff are able to check their emails daily, making SMS notifications a powerful communication tool.

“Functionality such as this is important during the response to COVID-19 and beyond as it will enable NSW Health to reach more staff on multiple channels to ensure coverage,” said Gary Rubie, Director of Corporate Programs, eHealth NSW.

“Being able to instantly reach staff via their mobile phones helps us to ensure patient care is never compromised.”
Cancer specialists in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region south of Sydney are holding multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings from behind the safety of their laptops, ensuring continuity of care for NSW Health cancer patients as the fight against COVID-19 continues.

“By conducting these meetings remotely, we can help preserve a functioning workforce of cancer specialists,” said Dr Elias Nasser, Staff Specialist in Radiation Oncology and Director of Cancer Services, Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District.

“Our normal model of conducting multidisciplinary team meetings with a room full of doctors could potentially decimate our cancer service provision if just one of the attendees were to be infected with COVID-19.”

For patients, it’s greatly reassuring that their cancer treatment will not be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, said Dr Elias.

“We can let them know that while it’s not business as usual at the moment, we are still providing a continuity of high-quality care,” he said. “It sends a strong message that their care is important and continuing – albeit remotely but no less thoroughly.”

Held in the conference rooms of the Illawarra and Shoalhaven Cancer Care Centres, MDT meetings typically involve at least 10 highly skilled clinicians including a medical oncologist, radiation oncologist, surgeons, radiologists, anatomical pathologists and their respective teams.

Should one of these clinicians succumb to sickness and/or enforced isolation, it puts at risk the entire team’s ability to care for people whose illness means they are already immuno-suppressed, said Dr Nasser.

Leveraging the infrastructure of the state’s digital health agency eHealth NSW, these meetings are now being held via Skype for Business.

Clinicians were pleased with the functionality of the Skype for Business platform and the changes necessitated by the COVID-19 epidemic will likely make a lasting impact on how Cancer MDTs are conducted in the future, Dr Elias said.
COVID-19 led to a huge upswing in the number of NSW Health staff working remotely in order to comply with government directives to stay at home wherever possible.

Helping to enable and support this unprecedented demand is eHealth NSW’s State Wide Service Desk (SWSD), which has never been busier, receiving 60,000 calls for support in March alone.

With its 100+ analysts based in Parramatta or Newcastle, SWSD is the 24/7 help desk for NSW Health. And help is what they are doing.

“We’re getting a huge number of requests for remote access, Skype for Business access, as well as a lot of requests for videoconferencing-related assistance,” said Harry Georgoulopoulos, Manager, State Wide Service Desk, eHealth NSW.

“We just got over that and now we are in in the thick of COVID. But we are coping well and are happy to help NSW Health staff to stay safe in their homes by enabling them to work remotely.”

Ninety per cent of SWSD staff are themselves working from home, and the remainder are equipped with the necessary tools and technology to enable them to do the same.

Despite COVID-related pressures, most NSW Health staff are keeping calm.

“It’s business as usual for a lot of our callers, who as clinicians work in highly stressful situations every day,” said Mr Georgoulopoulos.

“We are not getting a bunch of highly stressed people calling us for support, or if they are, they are hiding it very well. It shows how calm and measured NSW Health staff are being, even under all of this heightened pressure.”

NSW Health staff members requiring IT assistance can call the SWSD on 1300 285 533 or lodge a request via the SARA (Search and Request Anything) portal.