

Our vCreate Experience

P.B.J. Sanneerappa, C. Fitzpatrick, Y. Fennell, M. Tariq

Department of Paediatrics, Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise.

The Corona Virus Disease in 2019 (Covid-19) is a pandemic that has changed priorities in the world. Even though few businesses can operate from home, services like healthcare still needs to function in a hospital setting, which can cause a lot of stress among the frontline healthcare staff prompting many countries to adopt new strategies to combat this. In the UK a digital learning package using Agile methodology was introduced within the first three weeks of the outbreak¹, serving as a tool to help health care staff.

The physical distancing guidelines by Health Service Executive (HSE) allows only one parent are allowed to visit a child/baby in a hospital. This means newborn babies cannot see their dads, which could have a very strong impact on mental health. To overcome this many hospitals in the Republic of Ireland have adopted video messaging applications like Skype, WhatsApp, face time, Facebook calling and vCreate to connect everyone. After tremendous success in the Rotunda Hospital, Cork University Hospital, Coombe Women's Hospital, we at Midland regional hospital in Portlaoise used the vCreate application. Due to this initiative we were able to receive highly valuable contributions from the general public and friends of the hospital funds, which in turn enabled us to both buy the tablets and also to buy the subscription plans.

vCreate² is a secure video messaging service that allows our clinical team in the Special Care Baby Unit to send video updates to parents when they're unable to be with their baby. Mothers only are allowed access to the Unit and their baby. Dads and extended family are not allowed to visit. This is a way to minimise separation anxiety among dads. It shows that we as a unit care for the psychological and emotional needs of all the family and are willing to change and adapt to meet these needs, building trusting relationships with parents and families. It is very important to note that these videos and images can be downloaded and shared with extended family members, which means they can have these memories forever.

vCreate also has an important role to play in breastfeeding support. It helps mothers to continue breastfeeding during this pandemic which can further reduce stress and to give provide good quality milk to their babies³. It is very important to help her to promote good levels of oxytocin and reduce stress. Having a secure video and picture messaging service can help parents to build up a diary of events and images will help mothers emotionally and psychologically during their breastfeeding journey.

Many parents have given very highly valuable positive feedback regarding this new initiative. Last week, one of the SCBU nurses got a feedback from mum that vCreate images and videos really motivate her to keep pumping her breast milk when separated from her baby. It was lovely to hear these positive feedbacks and we strongly think that vCreate can really lift up the spirits of many mothers' who are at risk of post partum depression.

In conclusion, we think that vCreate is a fantastic application to connects dads' and extended families to spend very important virtual time with their babies remotely and we encourage other units across the country to adapt this application.

Corresponding Author:

P.B.J. Sanneerappa,
Department of Paediatrics,
Midland Regional Hospital,
Portlaoise.

Email: phanibhushan2005@gmail.com

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