

Not only has the coronavirus made us appreciate the NHS more, it has also made many of us question how, in an emergency, we could access care suited to our specific needs. This is where an innovative NHS service Coordinate My Care (CMC) comes in. It offers a digital record of your healthcare preferences, which is authorised by your GP before being made available to services from 999 and 111 to out-of-hours GPs and emergency departments.

'With CMC, when a person calls for help, they are not strangers – the urgent care services know their critical information,' says Professor Julia Riley, a specialist in palliative care, who founded the service in 2010. 'Not only do they know about any existing diagnosis and medications, but they also know small but important details, such as the fact that a patient likes to sleep with two pillows to feel comfortable, or that a neighbour has a key to allow paramedics access.'

'What we always say to people is: what would you like the urgent care services to know about you, if you had to call on them in an emergency at 2am?'

CMC is hugely beneficial to patients being treated for long-term conditions such as severe asthma, COPD, diabetes or mental health problems, which can often mean increased contact with urgent care services. 'I think people assume that if they have talked to their GP, then their wishes have automatically been recorded,'

'COVID-19 HAS TAUGHT US THAT ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN TO US AT ANY TIME'

SHUTTERSTOCK



MAKE A PLAN
myCMC (left),
brainchild of
Professor Julia
Riley (above)

IF YOU CALL 999...

...in the middle of the night, what would you like out-of-hours medics to know about you? With an ingenious NHS service, they can instantly access a digital record of your medical history and care preferences – helping both them and you.

By **Kathryn Knight**



says Professor Riley. 'But they're not. Often your GP has got one record, while the hospital has another.'

Coordinate My Care also provides huge support to patients undergoing palliative care. Professor Riley, who's spent the past 20 years as a palliative care consultant at The Royal Marsden Hospital, says her experiences have taught her that we should have a way of recording the way we want to live – and how we want to end our days.

Her views were crystallised by a family tragedy: just over 20 years ago, her sister-in-law Helena discovered she had a malignant melanoma. Within months, she learned it was incurable. 'At that point she said that whatever happened, she didn't want to go to hospital,' Professor Riley recalls. 'The problem was she used to get terrible headaches. Her husband would call an out-of-hours GP but because her care was not joined up, the default option was hospital.' In the event, the determination of Helena's husband meant she died at home. The experience left Julia determined to act.

'I got together with all the palliative care consultants in South London to try to come up with some sort of plan for people to record what they wanted,' she says. Advances in technology have enabled the plan to go digital – and the launch of the myCMC patient portal last year now means people can start registering their wishes at home.

Although currently only available in London, it is hoped CMC will be rolled out nationwide soon, and Professor Riley believes the nation's 400,000 care home residents should be a priority. 'Covid-19 has taught us that anything can happen to us at any time,' she says, so it's no wonder the pandemic has sparked a surge of registrations to the CMC service.

'A CMC plan links to all urgent care services, so if you call 999, it automatically flags to the ambulance crew, who will then have the key information they need and won't have to trawl through a million notes,' she says. 'If you live in London, help the urgent care services to help you by going online to initiate your own myCMC plan.'

For more information, visit mycmc.online.