

The Role of Telephone Triage Nurses in Supporting Older Adults with Multimorbidities in Ireland and Belgium to Self-Manage using Digital Technology

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INTRODUCTION

- **Multimorbidity**, the presence of **two or more chronic conditions**, places a significant burden on health systems worldwide. People managing multimorbidity face burdensome and complex self-management routines, including symptom monitoring, communicating with multiple healthcare providers, managing multiple medications and processing and managing potentially conflicting advice on conditions.
- With **50 million people** in the EU living with multimorbidity; risk factors for its development increasing with age; and, the cost and complexity of its management, the need for solutions to assist people with self-management of their conditions is becoming more urgent.
- ProACT, an EU H2020-funded project developed a digital integrated care system to support older people living with multimorbidity to self-manage their conditions, supported by a care network. Part of this project included a telephone nurse triage service to respond to any symptom alerts generated by those using the system.

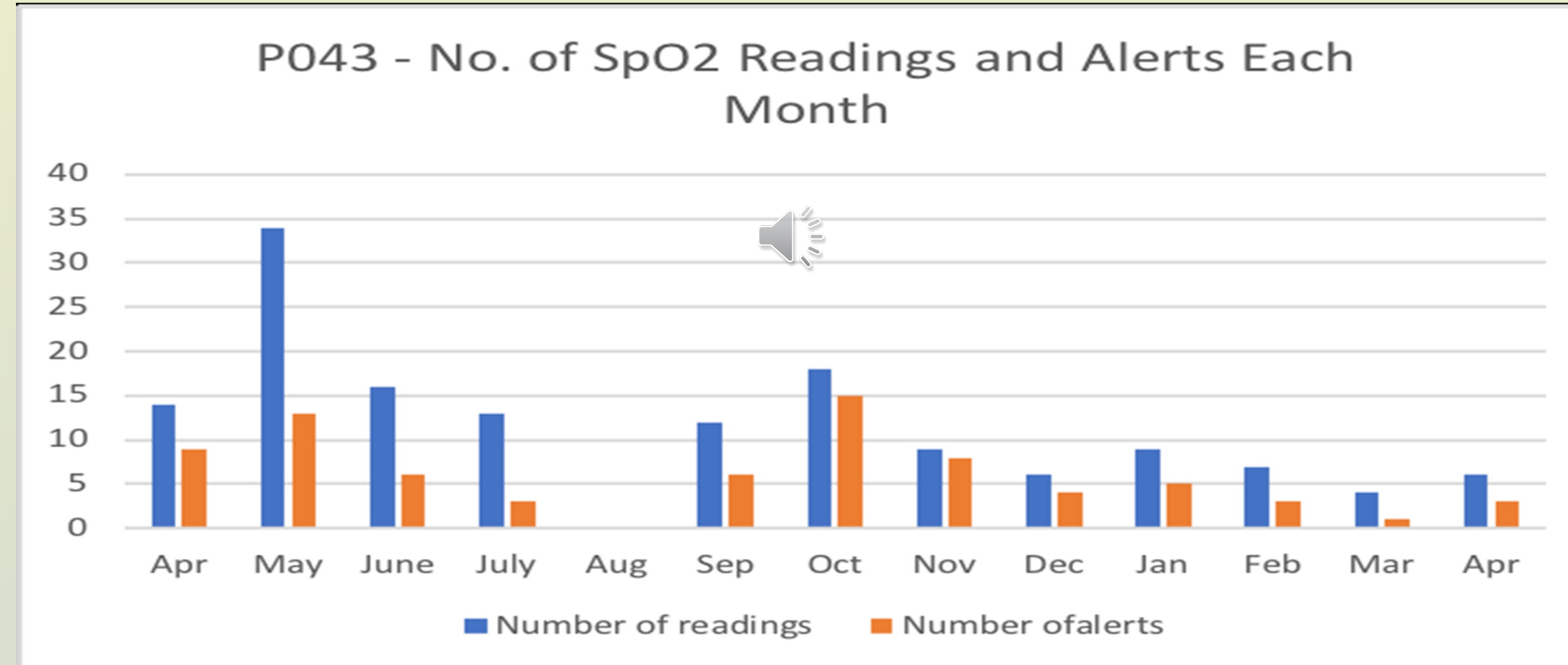


OBJECTIVES

- Research exploring the role that a telephone nurse triage service can play in holistically supporting older adults (65+ years) with multimorbidity to self-manage using digital technology is limited.
- This study aims to fill that knowledge gap by outlining findings from a longitudinal study with older adults using a digital health system to self-manage, with a triage service monitoring alerts.

METHODS

- Research was conducted with participants in Ireland and Belgium (**n=120**) who managed two or more chronic conditions (**Diabetes, Chronic Pulmonary Obstructive Disease and Congestive Heart Failure/Chronic Heart Disease**) in a 12 month trial using ProACT.
- Telephone triage support was provided by nurses in Ireland (**n=4**) and Belgium (**n=5**) to participants across both locations.
- Supports provided to participants included monitoring and responding to health and wellbeing data and alerts from digital devices (blood pressure, blood glucose, pulse oximetry), education and motivation.
- Focus groups with triage nurses and interviews with participants with multimorbidity were carried out. Thematic analysis was conducted on qualitative data using Nvivo 11 software.



RESULTS

- The key theme to emerge from one-to-one interviews with participants in Ireland and Belgium was related to **triage interventions** which included **medical** and **non-medical interventions** such as **education** and **provision of advice**
- For some participants, **advice from triage prompted a GP visit they had been avoiding**, while for others **reassurance from triage meant a GP visit was unnecessary**.
- Themes that emerged from focus group interviews with triage nurses across both research sites included **the relationship between themselves and participants** and **the benefits of triage to participants**.
- The importance of **rapport** was frequently mentioned by triage nurses as a key factor in helping them to **gather the correct information** they needed to make **appropriate diagnostic decisions**.
- Regular monitoring from triage nurses resulted in **greater awareness** by participants of their conditions and adoption of health behaviour strategies that resulted in an **'early catch'** of issues.

CONCLUSION

- Telephone triage, alongside a digital solution such as ProACT, has the potential to be effective in supporting older adults to better self-manage multimorbid health conditions and may also result in either decreased or more effective healthcare utilisation.
- Further research is required to explore the ways that triage nurses promote self-management of multimorbid chronic illnesses and the impact they have on older adults engagement with digital technology and resultant health behaviour changes.

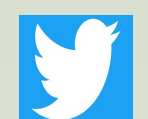


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