

Royal Marsden launch AI virtual agent using IBM Watson to support key workers post lockdown

London, 2nd July 2020 - The Royal Marsden, a world-leading cancer centre with hospitals in London and Surrey, has announced it has launched its first ever virtual agent called Ask Maisie, using IBM Watson Assistant. Maisie will ensure key workers have immediate access to the latest COVID-19 HR related information and policies as well as updates on the hospital and evolving workplace guidance as the country comes out of lockdown. This will enable the hospital to manage its workforce efficiently while helping to alleviate some of the additional worries key workers may be experiencing at this challenging time.

When COVID-19 struck, it created an unprecedented flood of information requests from hospital workers into its human resources team. This put an immediate strain on resources as employees looked for answers about childcare, shielding, workplace arrangements, testing and more. The wellbeing of its employees is crucial so The Royal Marsden has been working with IBM at pace to create a virtual agent that will help deliver the support that so many key workers need while reducing the strain on the human resources team.

As the country comes out of lockdown and Government guidance evolves, key workers will be able to access Maisie at any time via the hospital's intranet to get rapid and consistent information. Topics will range from advice for high risk workers, how to self-isolate, what happens when you receive official shielding letters to what to do if your child is off school and how to safely come back into the workplace. All responses will be based on information from trusted sources including the hospital's official workplace policy handbook as well as national bodies such as NHS England. With common questions answered more quickly through automation and AI, the human resources team will be free to engage in areas that are more complex or require a more personal, empathetic touch.

“As the pandemic evolves so have the long term implications on healthcare which include a growing expectation for immediate and remote access to trusted information. This has led to many healthcare providers accelerating digital transformation plans to give clinicians time to focus on patients alongside helping to manage the physical and mental health of their key workers” said Andreas Haimböck-Tichy, Director, Healthcare and Life Sciences, IBM UK and Ireland. “Digital transformation in healthcare is not just limited to the clinical environment. Modern technology has an incredible potential to change the way a hospital operates for the better and help revolutionise the care patients receive.”

The virtual agent brings together IBM Watson Assistant and its state-of-art Natural Language Processing capabilities delivered via the IBM public cloud, to understand and respond to common questions about

COVID-19. Now it has been launched it will continue to enhance its knowledge-base and learn from the interactions it has with users.

The radical shifts engendered by the coronavirus have fallen particularly hard on health providers. The crisis has put them in urgent need of the added agility that technology provides. As the country continues to make its way through the pandemic one thing is clear, by adjusting quickly and investing in the right technology, organisations can build resiliency and prepare for what the future has in store.

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