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Clinical secondees ensure technology fits with clinical practice

“This programme and the change management approach, delivered by Mouchel, a partner of CSC, has given us the resources and an approach we could have only dreamed of five or 10 years ago”

Declan Hadley, Associate Director of Information Management & Technology



Working with six separate patient administration systems across more than 100 sites made accessing patient information a big challenge for the clinicians working throughout Lancashire Care Mental Health NHS Trust.

The opportunity to develop one patient administration system by joining with the NHS National Programme for IT was seen as a major benefit for the Trust who were one of the first in the country to embrace the project. But it was not a case of driving this through as an IT project, but developing an approach and improving clinical and management practices.

The Trust took the bold step of seconding six clinicians, with a wealth of experience in mental health care, to help develop one easy-to-access NHS patient administration system which could store more real-time information and sweep away reams of paper information at a stroke.

Declan Hadley, Associate Director of Information Management & Technology at Lancashire Care NHS Trust and a mental health nurse by profession, said: *“With six systems, we struggled to know exactly who our patients were. It wasn’t an efficient system. Clinicians would be wasting time doing administrative jobs instead of getting on with treating patients. Administrators, in turn, would find their job of marrying patients with the latest information challenging and time consuming to say the least.”*

The six clinicians worked collaboratively with Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC) who were contracted to deploy the new system by NHS Connecting for Health under the NHS National Programme for IT. They offered specialist support for mental healthcare workers by using their clinical skills and knowledge to support the implementation. The team,

led by Chris Anderton, Project Manager and occupational therapist, helped care workers to use the new electronic PAS more effectively in their everyday practices.

The role of the clinical specialists has proved crucial in transforming the way clinical staff and administrators now work.

SIX OF THE BEST CLINICAL SPECIALISTS

Chris said: *“We recruited six people: four Community Psychiatric Nurses (CPNs) - two from adult mental health and two from older people’s mental health services and two occupational therapists to support the project and, essentially, help support the replacement of the six patient administration systems with one.”*

“When you’ve got six systems across the Trust, it’s hard to understand the core patient activity, such as the volume of patients, admissions, referrals, assessments, waiting lists and repeats visits. You simply can’t monitor performance on how you’re improving. To the man in street, of course, reporting details are not important - but treatment is. With this new system it is assisting us with performance and hence treatment.”

Seconding a pool of health professionals to champion new ways of working, tackle professional barriers and create an environment of trust was the key to the project’s success.

Lancashire Care was the first mental health trust to go live in April 2005 as part of the National Programme. The Trust took the decision to implement the system in stages. Staff at Central Lancashire were the first to be trained in using the new PAS. The clinical team ensured that these first users of the system were able to populate the system and that it was set up to meet their needs and the future needs of staff in the other areas.

RESULTS

BEYOND EXPECTATIONS

Trust staff were able to see the real benefits that the system was delivering in their every day work. For example, by having uniform coding, terminology and notation for patient registration – patients were easily identified and not duplicated on the system.

Tracey Handley, CPN and one of the clinicians seconded to the project, said: “The Trust took the decision that it was best for us as clinicians to talk to fellow clinician regarding the benefits of using this system.

“As full time secondees, we had the time to look at the benefits that the NHS Care Record Service (NHS CRS) could provide and then pass this knowledge onto our colleagues. In being able to highlight better and safer ways of working it led to an acceptance and usage of the system.

“I could show them, for example, that on this system it is possible to highlight a risk issue. If a CPN makes a morning home visit and identifies a risk issue, that risk would be communicated to another professional perhaps visiting later that day”.

ONE SYSTEM FITS ALL

It's clear that Lancashire Mental Health Trust, which covers 100 sites in a 200-mile area, needed a uniform system to progress, not a multitude of systems introduced over 20 years ago that are not linked, and, more importantly, do not allow staff to talk to each other efficiently to benefit patients and clients.

Bev Duckworth, CSC Deployment Manager for the Cumbria and Lancashire regions, said:

“The Trust's management share a common vision that drives the project forward. The only way to deliver a faster, more efficient service today is by making effective use of technology Declan and his team of clinicians know that the Trust needs fast and reliable access to better quality information to serve their patients and they know how that information should be used to support the best possible healthcare delivery. We at CSC know how to project manage big IT projects. Together we create the best partnership for success.”

Declan said: *“We realised that we needed to improve our IT systems, however we knew that just adding on new IT wouldn't deliver benefits. This project has been all about organisational change.”*

Ultimately, the patients will benefit as emergency beds can be found quickly with the new PAS. Declan said: *“It is often a time-consuming job to phone round sites across Lancashire looking for a free bed. The system will save time for clinical staff and reduce the wait for patients.*

“We can also see when the patient was admitted to hospital and when they were discharged. We are looking at developing the system to monitor the care of discharged patients. In the long run, this whole process will improve our performance and support the delivery of effective patient care.

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