Working collaboratively to achieve paper switch-off

The Princess Royal University Hospital (PRUH), located on Farnborough Common is part of the King’s College NHS Foundation Trust. It receives approximately 80 per cent of its referrals from the population served by NHS Bromley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

Cross team working

A team was gathered from across a number of organisations to lead the move to 100 per cent of all GP referrals for consultant-led first outpatient services to the e-Referral Service (e-RS).

The team had significant experience of working on the Choose and Book programme and took the hospital to paper switch-off (PSO) for all routine referrals in September 2017.

To achieve this, they benefited from strong support from their executive team. They developed a plan in August 2017 to ensure e-RS was used for referrals for all routine services, with two week wait referrals to follow on in April 2018 to ensure they achieved full PSO well in advance of the standard contract change.

This involved building in time after implementation to monitor the system and identify and resolve any issues, such as internal engagement, external communications, technology, and stakeholder training and education.

They also developed close relationships with local healthcare colleagues who understood e-RS, outpatient pathways and the interaction between the Patient Administration System (PAS) and e-RS.

This network enabled the team to centralise the e-RS Directory of Services (DoS), to review and ensure it was fit for purpose, and to map the services that needed to be set up in e-RS. Lead consultants for each service played a key role in developing the DoS.

Communications

Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) affected by PSO were contacted early by the e-RS team who worked through any questions they had or challenges they faced. The team identified and used established CCG-to-GP practice communication channels like bulletins and emails, to send updates and key messages. They also visited or contacted stakeholders to demo the e-RS system and show them how to navigate the DoS. To build strong relationships they had face-to-face meetings with key people.

“We decided to switch off paper referrals for all services at the same time and to do so as early as possible. This was only achievable because we worked closely as a team in an honest and open environment. Without a doubt, partnership work was the most successful factor in us achieving PSO.”

Jo-Anne Roberts
IT and tech experts

The team’s expertise helped to inform some of the considerations and actions hospitals and GP practices needed to make. This included:

- allowing time for consultants, secretaries and administration staff to apply for smart cards
- explaining ID requirements to those who needed cards
- confirming processes with registration authorities.

The team also worked with stakeholders to ensure computers throughout the system were e-RS ready. This included providing smart card readers to stakeholders and ensuring they had easy access to the e-RS website.

Referrals in 48 hours

All referrals are booked into e-RS and triaged by a relevant clinician within 48 hours. Referrals are either accepted or redirected and those which are clinically inappropriate are rejected.

For some specialist conditions, hospital appointments are restricted and require hospital staff to book patients’ appointments, which require a further referral.

This experienced medical intervention prevents less time critical cases being inappropriately referred for immediate consultation.

“Listening is key. It has been an integral part of this process, enabling people to raise their concerns or highlight where they need support. We worked hard to manage relationships across organisations and this continued as we moved into the monitoring and maintenance phase.”

Louise Hussey, CCG Project Manager Primary Care

“Significant change in large organisations like the NHS is not always easy, but our empathetic and supportive approach meant that the response we received was broadly positive. We are already seeing increased interest in the prospect of using e-RS for other pathways.”

Dee Leech, e-RS and OPD Systems Manager

Published July 2018.