CORNWALL NHS

"HOW IMPROVED ACCESS TO OPERATIONAL AND PATIENT MANAGEMENT DATA IS HELPING TO IMPROVE ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE."

INTRODUCTION

Waiting times, bed availability, financial pressures and staff resources are common headaches throughout the NHS. Access to information can play a key role in improving efficiency and making the most out of limited resources in today's health service.

Cornwall NHS Health Community serves a population of around 500,000 residents. This number is significantly increased by visitors to the county and more than doubles during the busiest summer period. Services are provided by three primary care trusts, Central Cornwall, North & East Cornwall and West of Cornwall. These include 80 GP surgeries and 11 community hospitals, the Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust, offering acute care, and Cornwall Partnership Trust providing mental health and learning disabilities services. The Health Community has a budget of approximately £450 million and employs around 10,000 staff.

THE CHALLENGE

With a complicated organisation such as the NHS, keeping track of performance and overall organisational efficiency can be a real issue for managers and the Board alike. What's key is being able to have immediate access to relevant and up-to-date information to operate as effectively as possible. For managers, having the necessary information at their fingertips enables them to review performance on a day-to-day basis and take the appropriate action if performance is not up to scratch.

Cornwall NHS Health Community traditionally relied on standard information systems run by the Information Department. Data was collected centrally and then analysed according to requests from managers and the Board. Much of the data collection and analysis had to be done manually which was a time-consuming process for all. Demand for analysis was such that the Information Department was inundated with requests resulting in often lengthy waits for more detailed reports into waiting lists, capacity planning, outpatient and inpatient activity for example.

In addition, the Cornwall NHS Health Community is required to complete mandatory returns based on operational data and patient management information for the Department of Health. Many being of a monthly and weekly frequency, these reports were time-consuming to produce for both managers and the Information Department.

THE SOLUTION

The Information Department at Cornwall NHS Health Community, headed up by Richard Johnson, recognised the need to develop a management information system to improve access to organisational data.

As a result, Cornwall NHS Health Community started working with Cognos partner, Bidetime, a specialist in the development and delivery of information systems for the healthcare sector. "Bidetime demonstrated that it really understands the workings of the NHS as well as the technology we were looking to implement," said Johnson.

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Following a formal procurement process, Cornwall NHS Health Community reviewed a number of technology solutions before selecting Cognos as the basis for the management information system across the whole organisation. "What really stuck out about Cognos was the technical functionality of its solutions combined with its ease-of-use," explained Johnson. "Using Cognos means we can enable managers with little technical knowledge to access, query and analyse organisational data according to their own individual needs."

THE RESULTS

Cognos reporting solutions are used in a variety of ways across the Health Community.

The technology is used by the Information Department to produce mandatory reports for the Department of Health. This covers a number of areas including Inpatients, Outpatients, Referrals, A&E, Theatres and several other areas of clinical and business information and is designed to help the Department assess the efficiency and performance of the NHS right across the county. Data can now be easily extracted from organisational systems and patient management databases and much of the analysis has been automated. As a result, reports can be produced up to ten times faster than before.

The Information Department also uses Cognos to produce regular reports for the Boards at Cornwall NHS Health Community. This includes details of key performance indicators such as waiting times, capacity, patient throughput and clinical outcomes, which are critical to the efficient and effective management of the Health Community.

The technology is also widely used by senior managers across the region to review and assess critical services.

For example, information on waiting lists can now be accessed easily by senior managers, helping them to improve waiting list management and meet Government targets.

Data from accident and emergency rooms can be accessed from a central data set providing better analysis to meet both internal and external reporting needs.

Theatre management is another key area of focus as it is one of the most expensive resources within the NHS. Using Cognos, managers can access far more detailed reports and analysis on how the region's surgical theatres are being used and review ways in which to improve efficiency.

There's also an increasing reliance on payment by results analysis looking at the financial expression of the care delivered across the region. This includes information on the number of inpatients, what level of care they received, the number of nights in hospital as well as consultant details. This is becoming increasing important as part of the strategic direction of the NHS in funding directly following patient care. If NHS trusts are to survive and thrive they must gain control and full understanding of their business – both in terms of income and expenditure.

And finally, Cognos technology means managers are better able to predict demand capacity and plan for the influx of tourists in the summer season or winter pressures such as flu outbreaks.

GOING FORWARD

The national NHS IM&T programme, Connecting for Health, is centralising and standardising systems and processes at a national rather than a regional level. According to Johnson, the move towards better data capture of both clinical and management data will bring with it an increased need for management information systems, based on Cognos technology, in order to meet future analysis and reporting requirements.

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