**NHS Confederation member case study**

**5 May 2016**

**Draft 1**

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**Refer-to-Pharmacy:**

**East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust**

**The challenge**

Community pharmacists are a valuable source of advice, not least for patients who have recently left hospital. In late 2011, two new national services were launched to help increase the support pharmacists can offer following a hospital stay – the New Medicines Service (NMS) for people with certain long term conditions and the Medicines Use Review (MUR), for advice and guidance on an individual’s medication.

However, there was often no easy and reliable way to inform community pharmacists when patients were leaving hospital. Community pharmacists also sometimes lacked all the information they needed to carry out an effective review.

This increased the risk of patients not using medicines, or not using them correctly which in turn made hospital readmissions or A&E visits more likely.

**What was done**

In East Lancashire, a new IT system called Refer-to-Pharmacy has been introduced which allows hospitals to electronically refer patients to a community pharmacy for the NMS or a MUR. The community pharmacist is able to see an electronic copy of the patient’s hospital discharge letter, which contains full details of their stay and of any medication changes.

East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust worked with an IT provider to develop the referral software, and ensure it worked well with existing systems. Ward-based pharmacists and community pharmacists were then trained in how to use the system.

An awareness campaign for patients and professionals supported the introduction of the new scheme. It included engagement on social media, the creation of a short film aimed at patients (viewable at: www.elht.nhs.uk/refer), and a launch event to which members of the local media were invited.

The trust worked with a number of partners to develop and implement the Referral-to-Pharmacy scheme:

* Lancashire Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC) supported community pharmacists in using the system.
* North West Coast Academic Health Science Network (AHSN) helped raise awareness of the scheme locally and nationally, and produced an evaluation of the scheme.
* The Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education produced an online training package to help pharmacists and technicians use the new system.
* Manchester University School of Pharmacy is currently carrying out a service evaluation of the scheme.
* The Royal Pharmaceutical Society produced a referrals toolkit to help other health economies successfully introduce a referrals system ([www.rpharms.com/referraltoolkit](http://www.rpharms.com/referraltoolkit)).

Reporting tools have also been developed which make it possible to identify and support any community pharmacist having trouble using the system. It is also possible to track the progress of referrals through to completion.

**The results**

1777 electronic referrals to community pharmacy were made between October 2015, when the scheme launched, and the 5th May 2016.

Several key pieces of data are being tracked to help evaluate the scheme, including readmission rates. Community pharmacists are also recording key outcomes, including time saved and reduction in medicines waste.

**Overcoming barriers**

* Securing funding: Funding was initially sought from a Department of Health innovation fund. However, the timescales proved unfeasible so bid was withdrawn. Instead, a business case was presented to the East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust information management and technology (IM&T) board, as well as to the main boards of Blackburn with Darwen and East Lancashire CCGs. A funding arrangement was agreed between the three organisations, with additional investment provided by the IT developer, Webstar Health.
* Training:It took nearly two months to train all ward-based pharmacists and technicians (90+) in the new system. The software is user-friendly, so the main focus was on understanding which community pharmacy services were available and which patients were most likely to benefit from a referral.

**Key learning**

* Don’t give up. Stick to the plan, and use influencing skills to surmount problems.
* Draw on the expertise of others. East Lancashire has created a novel referrals tool, and hosts colleagues who are interested in seeing the software and understanding how it works.

**For more information**

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