Northern NHS trusts share digital lessons for successful launch of major hospital system

North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust embraces ethos of NHS England's Global Digital Exemplar scheme to transfer 20+ year old data to modern patient administration system as part of change programme

Hospital patients in north Cumbria will be referred more quickly and efficiently to the right treatment and care following a technology partnership that has learnt vital lessons from a neighbouring NHS trust.

North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust has successfully gone live with a new patient administration system which will help more accurately track patients through the care pathway, improve sharing of clinical information, and provide streamlined reporting capabilities. This means that patients should be assigned the right care at the right time using the right pathways.

NHS data migration management experts Stalis partnered with established patient administration systems (PAS) provider Silverlink to deliver a new IT system at Northumbria, and the same teams have replicated similar success at North Cumbria.

The approach is closely aligned with ethos of NHS England's Global Digital Exemplar programme which aims for digitally mature NHS trusts to inspire others to demonstrate the safety and efficiency benefits of technology.

Mark Thomas, director of health informatics at North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust, who worked on both projects, said: "The hospital is going through a big system redesign to change care pathways and improve operational performance. We knew not to underestimate complexity of the project and not to set artificial deadlines."

The project was completed over a planned two-year timeframe, which saw 500,000 patient records migrated across more than 132 individual patient pathways. The deployment of Silverlink's referral-based IT system means the trust can now access a more accurate account of patients through their care pathways at any one time.

One of the main challenges was migrating data from a 20+ year-old system, where referral to treatment (RTT) and 18-week pathways did not previously exist, to a new modern database. Stalis extracted, cleansed, and migrated the data using its CareXML solution to ensure it was accurate and fit for purpose for future patient care.

There was no system downtime between the switchover that saw 60,000 forward appointments in 680 clinics transferred across to the new PAS. 99.6% of the clinics were data built and mapped with the remaining 0.4% records identified prior to, and manually updated on, the go-live weekend.

"Our data is now structured with standard terminology, helping to deliver data quality improvements. We can now report with greater

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certainly and more quickly identify if a patient is slipping on a pathway," said Thomas.

Thomas added: "It was vital we had a smooth transition to the new system and that clinical support, along with reporting functionality was maintained. The successful data migration meant no patients or financial rewards were lost due to reporting downtime."

The project was supported by a proactive staff development programme which saw 1,600 online tutorials and 600 face-to-face training sessions delivered.

"Engagement with clinicians and clerical staff was key as it was important for this not to be seen as back office or IT service. As a result, no more corridor conversations where consultant asks another consultant if they can pop in and see somebody, because they weren't able to coordinate the work together," said Thomas.

Stalis' CareXML data migration service is designed to be highly automated and to minimise user intervention and reduce the burden on scarce resources. The system offers rules based identification of data discrepancies and, through access to your originating patient record, enables fully validated data correction.

Andrew Meiner, managing director at Stalis said: "This project truly reflected a partnership approach to IT adoption, driven by multiple project stakeholders with a shared vision to deliver a system that would benefit staff and their patients.

"Data migration is a complex and at times high-risk activity. However, by taking on board lessons from the previous project at Northumbria, the team at North Cumbria mitigated that risk through high levels of staff engagement and a pragmatic approach to the resource required to safely transfer vital patient information to the new system."

Silverlink's PCS PAS will support the trust's administration processes and help run operations in a cost effective and compliant way. The trust selected the solution as it was a highly interoperable platform allowing the trust to adopt other clinical solutions that work for them.

Tim Quainton, managing director at Silverlink added: "Collaborating with Stalis to upgrade North Cumbria's patient administration system to our proven PAS was quick and seamless. The transfer of decades' worth of patient records to a new system went off with minimal delay to the trust's operations, and staff were given the training and support they needed to hit the ground running."

Reflecting on the partnership approach, Thomas concluded: "Our partners on this project delivered what they said they would, and on time. The Stalis team were incredibly knowledgeable on NHS data migration and management, and understood what we were trying to achieve from the start. Silverlink provided a modern product with multiple functions and their NHS experience was invaluable".

The trust is working towards its vision of being digital at the point of care, supporting the aims of the Five Year Forward View. The next stage of the project will see the integration of electronic clinical pathways from GP referrals to the appropriate care setting, depending on patient need, across the health economy in Cumbria.