Ahead of its time:
How NHS Cumbria CCG paved the way with continuous feedback to drive quality improvement across care settings

iWantGreatCare
Introduction

The vanguard programme presents an exciting vision of the future. NHS England has made clear that key to realising this future is the ability to measure and understand outcomes that matter to patients. This case study describes how one integrated care system began working with iWGC long before the new models of care were established, to capture feedback across providers and settings, deriving insight for measuring change and driving improvement.

Background

NHS Cumbria CCG is one of the largest CCGs in England, commissioning care for a population of 510,000 people. A particular challenge for commissioners here is to provide adequate resources for the hugely varied population: 40% are classed as deprived; there are pockets of both isolation, with 10% living in rural areas, and overpopulation in the larger towns, as well as seasonal fluctuations in population thanks to a booming tourist industry.

In addition to this, the population is older than the national average, a trend likely to continue as more people retire to the area. Four general hospitals provide emergency and acute services; there are nine community hospitals, 77 GP surgeries and over 60 community and mental health services across the region. The population's demographics, combined with the challenging geography of Cumbria, means that small GP and nurse-led community hospitals are an effective and popular way of ensuring that vulnerable and isolated communities can access care. However, the combination of small providers - usually with around 20 beds - which mainly focus on minor injuries, rehabilitation and palliative care, alongside a 96.5% white-british1 and ageing population, can lead to a lack of both the volume and diversity of cases required to attract and retain clinicians to the area. This results in persisting recruitment difficulties which only exacerbate varying care standards across the region.2

In 2012, NHS Cumbria CCG identified that public confidence in the county’s hospitals was low and service quality needed to improve. Throughout 2011 and 2012, a review commissioned by NHS England into 14 trusts in special measures - including North Cumbria, a part of Cumbria CCG - was led by Professor Sir Bruce Keogh, who found that: “In the two years to 31 January 2013, there were 61 comments on North Cumbria of which 21 were negative (34%). Key themes include poor complaints procedures, poor reputation locally, low staff morale linking to poor staffing attitudes, lack of professionalism amongst staff and poor arrangements of appointments.”1

In isolation, these comments from patients were insufficient to trigger action, yet set against a troubled regional backdrop and poor CQC inspections, it became clear to Cumbria CCG that rapid changes were required to make the people of Cumbria proud of their NHS once more, to build staff morale and to improve the quality of care.

Solution

Clinical Chair Hugh Reeve and his senior team at Cumbria CCG realised they needed to provide leadership to establish public confidence and re-engage with patients across its six regions. Dr Reeve’s vision was to use the thread of patient experience as a common factor, key driver and quality metric to re-shape how care was provided across the county and join up services. This in itself is no mean feat, but ensuring that the patient voice was put at the heart of commissioning decisions would also be key to driving the necessary improvements.

The Keogh review found that providers and commissioners across the board were struggling to understand and take full advantage of the data available on quality, as it was held in a fragmented way across the NHS and difficult both to interpret and to use for benchmarking performance.3

The CCG set out to create a system-wide platform for measuring patient feedback that allowed patients to compare experiences across all providers and along whole pathways of care. Dr Reeve wanted a system capable both of comparing value delivery, as well as acting as an early warning system to highlight providers who may require further support.

“Real-time patient feedback and comment must become a normal part of provider organisations’ customer service and reach well beyond the Friends and Family Test.”3

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The initial vision for the platform that would revolutionise and empower an entire health economy was set out by the CCG.

Extract from NHS Cumbria CCG’s meeting minutes, July 2012

108/12 Agenda Item 11 – Patient Experience

The adoption of such a [patient feedback] system will assist with:

- Potential for new contract models
- ‘Industrial scale’ information on patient experience across a range of provider and primary care services
- Creating regular reports to be used as agreed quality measures and metrics
- An easy-to-access ‘interface’ for patient commentary, with multi-channel methods of accessing the system e.g. website, social media, apps and paper-based commentary
- Monitoring and assessing feedback in real time

The premise was simple. If you receive care in Cumbria, you should be able to give feedback on that care directly, in real time, on a platform that is transparent and freely available to the public. Furthermore, all feedback would be published online, meaning that information across all local health services can be viewed in one place.

All Cumbrian health service providers worked together to share best practice, compare their services and, where possible, agree standardised questions and metrics to monitor and measure patient experience. This was not an easy or quick task; uniting this number of providers took both time and diplomacy.

Dr Reeve realised that a digital portal was needed to become the hub of patient-generated information, which encompassed the requirements outlined on page four and afforded commissioners concrete measures by which they could improve services, inform future commissioning intentions and set out contractual requirements. In doing this, Cumbria would be the first CCG in the UK to use iWGC’s solution to collect and collate patient experience data, in real time, across an entire healthcare economy.

The iWGC platform allows Cumbria CCG to track the performance of its providers, benchmarking like-for-like against each other...
The Cumbria Health Matters website (www.iwantgreatcare.org/cumbria) was launched in July 2013. Powered by iWGC, the site allows patients to review any health service in Cumbria and view what others are saying about a service, accessing simple and easy-to-interpret data, in real time. The website is open to the public to review their care experience 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

By the end of June 2016 it housed 181,442 reviews; 7,020 from GPs, and 174,422 from acute trusts. Of these, 26,662 came from children, young people and their carers. A previously under-represented patient group, many of the children’s reviews have come via iWGC’s innovative app designed in consultation with groups of young patients.

Speaking two years after the introduction of iWGC across services in Cumbria, Dr Reeve said: “The iWGC platform allows Cumbria CCG to track the performance of its providers, benchmarking like-for-like against each other according to Net Promoter Score, star rating and more. This detail and timeliness means that the feedback can be shared with individual services, wards and departments in real time, in order to make improvements.”

The ability to access detailed patient experience data in a simple and meaningful way has led to increased engagement across providers and even a healthy competition across teams and within organisations. The CCG also coordinates a continuous improvement programme with all providers, with patient experience as a focal point in discussions about care quality.

The first systemic patient feedback system to cover an entire health economy and whole care pathway, Cumbria CCG has led the way in breaking down barriers between individual providers working in silos, and has created a unifying dataset which can benchmark key quality metrics across a variety of services. The iWGC platform yields both quantitative and qualitative data, delivering analysis of contractual value and enabling patient-centred service improvements across the entire healthcare provision in Cumbria.

“Going forward, getting a higher volume of reviews from GP surgeries will be important as the iWGC platform embeds itself further across the healthcare landscape, as the response rate is lower than we would like in some practices. Overall, having real-time data in the hands of those who make the decisions, when they make the decisions, is key for us as we continue to shape Cumbria’s NHS to meet the expectations of the people who live here.”

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**About iWantGreatCare**

Shocked at the variance in standards of care across the UK and driven by his passion as a clinician to address this, Dr Neil Bacon founded iWantGreatCare in 2008. iWantGreatCare (iWGC) set out with a vision to improve the standards of care worldwide through empowering patients to give real-time, direct, honest feedback to their doctors, nurses, dentists, physiotherapists, hospitals, GPs and more.

For individual clinicians, the platform that was first feared (in case of poor feedback) has more often than not served to re-affirm the very values and motivations which underlie the drive to work in healthcare in the first place. Grateful patients thanking those who have cared for them or their loved ones in their time of need make up the vast majority of reviews. These give staff who dedicate themselves daily to providing outstanding care for patients the recognition they deserve, from the people who matter the most. Moreover, providers report that the overwhelmingly positive feedback consistently boosts staff morale. The less positive reviews allow learning and reflection for clinicians and organisations who strive to deliver best-in-class medical care.

iWGC passionately believes that the problem of the variance in standards of care – and therefore outcomes – can be addressed when patient experience is used correctly and constructively as a quality metric. It is a game-changing technology that enables open, transparent dialogue between patients and clinicians and heralds an era of true patient partnership. iWGC now operates in 23 countries and many more languages. With over 3 million individual healthcare reviews, it is the single largest independent source of patient feedback in the world.

**iWantGreatCare’s solutions**

For Trusts, the detailed, comprehensive feedback gathered and processed in real time allows for individual benchmarking of quality between wards and services. iWGC turns patient experience into a robust quality metric, engaging patients in a transparent and meaningful way in real time and acting as a powerful indicator of risk and harm.

For the new models of care, iWGC offers the opportunity to prove the value of the vanguard’s approach, in timescales that are quick enough to work around the one-year funding cycle. Based on experience from working with ACNC, Cumbria CCG and the Symphony programme, iWGC’s solution for vanguards is quick to implement, unifies measurement across the many different areas of the vanguard, aligns to individual vanguard objectives and maps to a number of the key metrics for NHSE. The solution is multi-channel, easy to access for hard-to-reach groups and covers PREMs and PROMs in all settings, whether community or acute, primary or secondary.

iWGC believes in a long-term partnership approach with its clients and is genuinely dedicated to improving healthcare for the benefit of all patients across the UK.

To find out more about iWGC’s solution, please contact clients@iwantgreatcare.org or call +44 (0)1993 868428.