Case study
Northern Lincolnshire Local Health Community

Improving patient service at the point of delivery

The BT-supported mobile working project for Northern Lincolnshire NHS Trusts enhances care in the community

Client
Both NHS North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire Care Trust Plus have a history of working collaboratively to improve healthcare in the Local Health Community. Together they serve around 350,000 residents in the urban areas of Scunthorpe, Immingham, Grimsby, and Cleethorpes, as well as in rural communities across Northern Lincolnshire.

Challenge
In 2008, the two trusts commissioned a proof of concept trial to assess the potential benefits of improved mobile working facilities for clinical staff, with the explicit objective of providing access to clinical records at the point of care. Trevor Wright, Associate Director of Informatics serving both of the trusts, recalls: “We knew that BT had a lot of flexible working experience, so that’s where we went for advice. Not only did its people assist us with technology choices, but also they provided guidance on other considerations like change management and the cultural aspects.”

The proof of concept, involving a select group of staff, concluded that enhanced mobile working would definitely improve clinical service. Trevor Wright continues: “The exercise showed that providing access to records at the point of care would enable new ways of working to improve efficiency and clinical outcomes. The potential benefits for patient care, productivity, and staff wellbeing were very significant.”

Under the NHS National Programme for IT, the trusts established the Northern Lincolnshire Mobile Working Project. A project team was established to oversee the design and execution of full-scale mobile working deployment over a four-year timeframe. One of the first NHS projects of its kind, the principal focus was towards clinical staff, but the scope of the project was quickly extended to include corporate users in the two organisations.

The BT differentiators
• BT has worked closely with the NHS since it was formed over 60 years ago and is the largest supplier of ICT services to the NHS in England
• BT is both a provider and practitioner of flexible working, offering change management consultancy as well as the products
• As a provider of mobile network services and portable hardware, BT provides a one-stop-shop accountable for the whole solution
• BT has well established relationships with hardware vendors and mobile network operators such as Panasonic and Vodafone

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Trevor Wright
Associate Director of Informatics
NHS North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire Care Trust Plus
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**Solution**

A ruggedised Panasonic Toughbook laptop – as used and recommended by BT – was chosen as the preferred mobile device. Waterproof and tolerant of hard use, this lightweight device has in-built Wi-Fi facilities and an integral smart card reader. The laptops are pre-configured and supplied by BT against a standard build, and BT also provides a helpdesk and a next day replacement service for faulty hardware.

Mobile network connectivity is provided under a BT Mobile contract featuring unlimited access and download. Although network coverage proved excellent in most urban areas of Northern Lincolnshire, coverage in more rural parts of the county was more problematic. In response, BT negotiated special arrangements with other mobile service providers and now offers network options to best match users’ locations.

The first phase of the deployment involved 210 devices mainly for community clinicians, but including 27 corporate users who needed to work flexibly. The solution enables those users to access the trusts’ networks and the SystemOne clinical records application virtually anywhere they are working – while a secure mobile VPN connection safeguards patient confidentiality.

Trevor Wright comments: “BT did a great job working with Panasonic to resolve some early teething problems – particularly around hibernation and optimising battery life – to make sure we got the best performance. BT has also run valuable workshops on the cultural aspects of flexible working, particularly to reinforce the need for a change in the way we go about our daily routines.”

**Value**

With phase one of the programme complete the trusts reviewed the business benefits of the project. The results were outstanding. Survey feedback revealed that the solution gave 88 per cent of respondents more time to work, while 53 per cent said that it had a positive impact on patient care. Nearly 80 per cent of respondents said better access to information in the field enabled more informed clinical decision-making and improved patient safety. Meanwhile, the ability to update clinical records in real time at the point of care is seen to be improving data quality and offering greater efficiency.

Trevor Wright observes: “The mobile working project has fully met our expectations. Our clinicians are already reducing ineffective time, such as travelling, and are saving at least an hour a day. Better access to clinical records is aiding diagnosis and helping to avoid unnecessary referrals and admissions. This aspect alone could save the Northern Lincolnshire trusts approximately £450,000\(^1\) a month once the solution is fully deployed and the changes to the way staff work have bedded-down.”

In sustainability terms, clinicians are now able to work from home rather than go to the office, reducing travelling and carbon emissions. With fewer office-based staff the need for fixed accommodation is reducing, while flexible working is enhancing the work life balance of the people involved. Based on this the trusts have established agile working projects to explore the opportunities to further exploit the technology to allow staff to work smarter.

The trusts have now embarked on the second phase of the deployment, which will see a further 250 clinicians and corporate staff equipped with mobile working facilities. The third and fourth phases will extend the deployment to a total of 1,000 people. Trevor Wright sums up: “Providing incredible value and showing commitment throughout the project, BT really is a great company to work with. I have no hesitation in recommending BT to other trusts considering a similar project.”

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**Core BT services**

- Flexible Working Services including Workstyle Consultancy
- Hardware and software supply and support services, including a help desk
- BT Mobile services offering 3G and GPRS connectivity

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\(^1\) This is a customer assessment of potential savings based on full roll out as per the implementation plan. Figures are based on one less admission per month, per practitioner, saving £75 admission cost. Additional savings of £250 per night, per admission hospital cost, have also been factored in.