

Case Study

Towards a paperless NHS: Removing the paper trail from Hospital to GP Practices

St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust implemented PCTI's EDT Hub to transfer patient letters electronically to 78 practices. In January 2013, the Trust sent over 18,000 patient letters electronically using EDT Hub. The Trust is now sending Discharge Summaries from A&E and Outpatient departments electronically with an aim to integrate further clinical correspondence through EDT Hub and increase the volume of documents that will be sent electronically.

Streamlining the transfer of information

The primary function of the medical discharge summary is to support the continuity of care as the patient returns to the care of the primary care provider. St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust previously generated approximately 7000 medical discharges per month utilising a paper-based, manual process. Approximately 85% of paper medical discharge summaries are for patients registered to St. Helens, Halton and Knowsley GPs.

Delivery of a paper letter can be time consuming to process and transfer to a GP practice. The process often takes days; however, by utilising an electronic system, a streamlined process enables the seamless transfer of patient letters electronically between organisations without putting patient care on hold, resulting in a seamless and immediate transfer of a patient's care.

Safer and improved delivery of GP correspondence

The objectives of the EDT Hub project were the delivery of the electronic discharge summaries containing clear, concise and legible information to GP's to lead to safer and improved continuity of care between secondary and primary providers. The discharge is distributed to GP's with a comprehensive audit trail with the knowledge that every letter can be tracked and confirmed delivery.

It is accepted the legibility of the information recorded on the paper discharge summary, specifically the 'To Take Out' (TTO), discharge medications data was of an inconsistent quality due to them being hand written nature and manual amendments to the original information.

The approach at the Trust is that the electronic discharge summary becomes a live document from the moment the patient is admitted to hospital. The development of a comprehensive electronic discharge template which is used across the Trust for in-patient discharge is designed to ensure that GPs receive appropriate information in a timely and secure manner.

Project Background

- GP's, patients and carers have, over many years, expressed discontent about the generally poor quality of paper discharge summaries. In order to address this problem, a standardised electronic Discharge summary has been developed.
- The electronic discharge summary ensures comprehensive and consistent information based upon guidance from the Academy of Royal Colleges and tailored for speciality specific input, and is delivered to GPs in a timely manner.
- The deployment of ICE eDischarge commenced in late December with appropriate training and user support as required.

- The initial rollout focused on medical and surgical inpatient wards, moving onto deployment in associated assessment areas across Whiston and St. Helens hospitals.
- eDischarge summaries will be applicable to in patient discharge, transfers and deceased patients.

A paper process is time consuming and costly

Sending the discharge summary using a postal system means the Trust needs to print, manually handle the letter, transport it, insert into an envelope, frank and transport the letter to a mail room. The costs of sending a paper letter costs between 50p and £1 per letter and incurs a process of up to 1 minute per letter to manually handle the letter before it reaches the courier service.

Distribution of poor quality data to Primary Care may lead to:

- Serious incidents occurring
- Staff and patients being put at risk through invalid or incorrect decisions being made about a patient's care
- Loss of confidence in the validity of the recorded information
- Adverse results from the Healthcare Commission through the Annual Health Check.
- Poor management decisions within or about the Trust
- Loss of income to the Trust (through payment-by-results)

The solution

EDT Hub is a multi-directional document transfer platform that provides a secure, reliable and flexible platform for the electronic communication of documentation between secondary, primary and social care providers. EDT Hub captures documents from Secondary Care systems and distributes them to GP practices.

EDT Hub is one of the most commonly used solutions for sending and receiving electronic patient letters directly to and from GP practices. Practices using Docman receive electronic documents directly from the Hub into Docman's workflow engine. The benefits include no requirement for scanning, auto-patient matching, pre-populated filing fields and significantly improved document processing time.

Docman provides a complete electronic document management, messaging and workflow solution for over 6,000 GP practices. Docman simplifies workflow processes by easily presenting electronic letters in front of individuals to review, comment, highlight or note simple actions. GPs will spend less time on administrative tasks, whilst being able to access information from any computer in the practice and be up to date with a patient's record instantly.

Sending letters electronically

The point at which a patient's care transfers from a hospital to their GP is critical, with clear advantages in being able to send patient discharge summaries electronically during the handover. Sending the discharge summary electronically has obvious benefits - both in terms of the timely transfer of this essential information, as well as minimising re-keying of information and thus the possibility for errors to arise, ultimately resulting in safer care for patients.

Benefits realisation

This describes the key business benefits that will be derived as part of the delivery of this project are listed below:

- Distribution of eDischarges for all inpatients who are registered to St. Helens, Halton and Knowsley GPs and are treated in St. Helens and Whiston hospitals
- Provision of a structured, consistent and comprehensive format for data entry based upon Academy of Royal Colleges and Department of Health and Connecting for Health guidance
- Integration with core Trust systems permitting data to be automatically populated into the eDischarge summary
- Permits the monitoring of the status of all eDischarge summaries

- Allows each eDischarge summary to be created over time or within a single session
- Permits multiple contributors
- Eliminates the need for completion of a hardcopy discharge summary
- Contains clear and legible information

Wider benefits include:

- Timely delivery of inpatient clinical information to GPs
- Improved quality of clinical information to GPs
- Increased GP awareness of patients being treated/admitted to hospital
- Safer and more efficient transfer of a patient care between providers
- Time saving efficiencies by eliminating the paper process
- Cost savings, i.e. no need for paper/forms/postage/envelopes

Neil Darvill, Director of Informatics at the Trust explains *“The aim of the project was to automate the process of sending documents to practices and to transfer information in a speedy way. Before Docman we had a mixed economy of how practices managed paper in their practice, but with Docman the process is now consistent and streamlined.”*

“Interoperability was a key driver for us in the project, transmitting timely information to GPs from providers directly in to their workflow process in Docman. Following a roll-out of Docman a few years ago with GPs in the area liking the solution it was a sensible approach to introduce EDT Hub.”

“By delivering documents in to Docman it removes the scanning process, practices benefit from pre-populate filing fields and the document is sharply workflowed. A practice can also electronically summarise and code the letter to ensure data quality through a simple process.”

“Outpatient letters from the local hospital and A&E information is being sent and we are rolling out discharge summaries. We are working with the local community trust to send even more documents electronically to GP practices.”

“Feedback from practices is very positive with information being received within 24 hours after an event. A paper process could take two weeks, the document would need to be scanned in and only then it would be available for the GP. By using an electronic process the information is received in a clear format and not handwritten notes. The project has been part of improving communication to the audience and making a positive change to all stakeholders.”

“A letter sent through the post could be received 3 to 4 weeks after an event and then it would need to be manually handled by someone to process. This involved various processes and these interim steps have either been removed or have been significantly reduced by implementing an electronic process. This creates a process that is secure, efficient and ensures data quality, all vital elements when dealing with the care of a patient. A practice can reject a letter received in error, so that the document can go back to the source straight away to be dealt with, where a paper process would cause huge delay. By receiving information electronically, GPs receive the information they need in a timely way allowing them to deliver more efficient continuous care for a patient by having the information readily at their fingertips. An electronic process can also assist practices plot trends, for example patients attending A&E.”

“We aim to expand the project to community care providers, the 111 service and Out of Hours services so that we can deliver as much information electronically as possible. This provides an evolution to the project and improves the granularity to become paper free.”

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About PCTI

PCTI is a market leading supplier of Electronic Document Management, workflow and messaging software to the Healthcare sector. The company provides solutions into both primary and secondary care with more than 6000 GP practices processing nearly 3 million physical and electronic documents per week and holds detailed records for over 37 million patients. EDT Hub is used in over 90 Secondary Care settings within the UK for joining-up health communities and professionals.

About St Helens & Knowsley Health Informatics Service

St Helens & Knowsley Health Informatics Service (StHK HIS) delivers IT systems and services to every type of NHS organisation, from Commissioners to Provider services, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary care and mental health, winning a raft of awards for our services and systems.

The fundamental components of the service are built on quality in-house staff, industry standard ICT infrastructure, robust information systems, business processes and an overarching culture of delivery, whilst working with customers to ensure strategy and innovation meets clinical and business needs.

StHK HIS is a unique shared service, and unlike outsourced IT services, works in partnership with all its customers, allowing the effective use of skills and resources, economies of scale and HIS experience and knowledge to be a benefit to all customers.

StHK HIS is governed by the Health Informatics Service Board, which has a membership drawn from all its customers. The Board has the responsibility for approving the Informatics strategy, including approval for funding and expenditure to support the strategy.

StHK HIS currently provides Informatics services to six major stakeholders, servicing over 14,000 users, including directors, admin/clerical staff, general practice staff, community care providers, consultants and nurses, all located across almost 16 sites.

Widely acknowledged as an innovative leader in electronic patient records deployment, we have built on our success over the years and now offer our services to a number of NHS organisations across the UK.