



INTEGRATED DIGITAL CARE RECORD

Success Story

Safer Hospitals, Safer Wards Technology Fund

Northampton General Hospital

January 2015

THE CHALLENGE

Northampton General Hospital (NGH) recognised the need for improvement when it came to patient observations. Like many other Trusts, nurses were making written notes of numerous procedures for charts placed at the end of patients' beds, a process that was not only time consuming for nurses, in terms of writing and filing but also left a wide margin for error due to misinterpretations of handwriting or charts being misplaced.

The solution for NGH came in the form of VitalPAC, an electronic observations system that monitors and analyses patients' vital signs. The system records patient observations and can immediately summon the necessary help if the patient's condition worsens via the use of an electronic device, such as a tablet or PDA, across the hospital.

Recorded data is fed into an algorithm which automatically alerts senior staff and doctors if urgent care is required. Replacing the manual system, this electronic solution is the first of its kind in the Northampton area and it has reduced errors by 300%.

IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW

The idea of an electronic observations solution was conceived in November 2012 and is currently used by 1500 staff across 26 wards. The process began by the Trust implementing Vitalpac in March 2014 with two wards, and then increasing that figure by two wards on a weekly basis completing the project in July 2014.

Funded by the Safer Hospitals Safer Wards Funds the Trust secured £370k for their IT department to implement the software and procure mobile devices across 26 wards.

"VitalPAC has really made a difference. With less errors and PAS integration the solution delivers a more convenient and less complicated system. It keeps staff informed and free to give their patients the care they deserve."

Fiona Barnes,
Deputy Director of Nursing, Northampton General Hospital

LESSONS LEARNED

The use of technology has delivered rapid efficiencies in tracking patient health and greatly reduces the risk of human error. NGH recognise a rapid and thorough training programme for new systems is essential, particularly around the use of mobile technology, which some staff found difficult to adapt to. Like most healthcare providers, more time to invest in change management and training would be ideal to support staff with adapting to new ways of working.

FUTURE

Due to the success of Vitalpac with nursing staff at NGH, the Trust is looking to further expand the solution to its clinicians. This will provide an improved view of patients to enable doctors to make more informed decisions when it comes to patient health by alerting them directly should a problem arise.

RESULTING BENEFITS TO PATIENTS AND STAFF

The new system was integrated into the Trust's incumbent Patient Administration System (PAS), giving all devices convenient access to patient data.

Vitalpac has also been integrated with the pathology and radiology systems, with plans for further integration with 'Ward Workspace' the Trust's inpatient EPR portal, displaying a ward layout to allow staff to immediately check patient vital signs scores and quickly identify any early warning signs. This hugely benefits staff and delivers patients the best support if their condition happens to deteriorate.

IN A NUTSHELL

SOLUTION:

Electronic observation system of patient vital signs

IMPLEMENTATION:

November 2013 – July 2014

FUNDING:

Safer Hospitals, Safer Wards

PATIENT BENEFITS:

More responsive levels of care from healthcare professionals

STAFF BENEFITS:

Reduce administration, quicker checks on all ward patients via mobile devices

TRUST BENEFITS:

Integrated patient data giving up to date patient records to staff

RESULT:

Patient observation errors reduced by 300%

"New technology is essential to the efficient running of our hospital and to the safety of our patients. This system enables nurses to quickly and accurately record observations and continue doing what they do best."

Christina Malcolmson
Deputy IT Director, NGH

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