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James Blacklock, Programme Implementation Manager, NHS Cumbria

power to you



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William Lumb, General Practitioner, NHS Cumbria

NHS Cumbria is a Primary Care Trust (PCT) in North-West England responsible for planning and managing local NHS resources, including GPs, dentists and other community health services.

The organisation manages an annual health budget of £800 million with a key priority to increase services to patients at home and in their local communities.

However the predominantly rural nature of South Lakeland means that delivering home and community-based treatments is particularly challenging. Historically, healthcare staff had to limit visits in the community because of the time it took to travel back to their offices to complete administration work.

To overcome this challenge, NHS Cumbria wanted to provide employees with remote access to an application called EMIS Web. With this in place, staff could complete administration and update healthcare records while away from their offices, after seeking patient consent.

James Blacklock, Programme Implementation Manager for NHS Cumbria, says: “We ran a proof of concept and it highlighted that mobile access made sense both in terms of administration and from a clinical, decision-making perspective. The trial showed an increased number of patient visits achieved and a significant reduction in mileage.”

Tight security

Although the results gave NHS Cumbria the evidence it needed to provide mobile access, the PCT still had to ensure that access to data was secure. “Because of the sensitivity of healthcare data, we had to deliver both reliable connectivity and tight security,” says James.

NHS Cumbria researched a number of approved suppliers with the help of Public Sector procurement specialists at the Office of Government Commerce. Vodafone proved to be the most responsive, putting the PCT in touch with other Vodafone healthcare programmes around the country to share experiences and best practice.

James comments: “We received excellent support from the outset. A technical team from Vodafone worked alongside our own project team to scope requirements and design a solution. Vodafone recommended a number of devices for accessing data remotely, highlighting the advantages and potential drawbacks of each model.”

With the support of Vodafone, NHS Cumbria was able to evaluate the devices in the field. “The evaluation was crucial in finding the best solution for employees and maximising the speed of adoption,” recalls James.

At the heart of the solution are netbooks with mobile broadband connectivity via the Vodafone network, which employees use to access healthcare data remotely.

The highly portable devices are also installed with Vodafone Secure Remote Access (VSRA), which establishes a secure connection between the netbooks and NHS Cumbria’s back-end infrastructure.

“Being able to update records from any location means nurses’ administration time is now reduced by around 15%.”

**Clare Rice, Operational Service Manager,
South Lakes Respiratory Team, NHS Cumbria**

Reduced administration

“With VSRA, the connections between the netbooks and central servers are safe and adhere to our rigorous IT and data security policies,” says James.

VSRA is the only mobile and remote working solution approved by the Communications Electronics Security Group (CESG), the information assurance arm of GCHQ. James says: “The implementation of Vodafone Secure Remote Access means we’re exceeding our security requirements.”

Working with Vodafone, the PCT has already enabled 250 staff from 12 different community service units in the South Lakeland area of Cumbria to work in a truly mobile way. The plan for the future is to extend the scheme to the whole of Cumbria, giving more than 1,000 nurses, health visitors and other community service providers the ability to work effectively while on the move.

NHS Cumbria healthcare staff in South Lakeland are reporting a variety of benefits from the project. “Being able to update records from any location means nurses’ administration time is now reduced by around 15%,” says Clare Rice, Operational Service Manager, South Lakes Respiratory Team, NHS Cumbria. “When I got stuck at home due to heavy snow I could still access both clinical and staff data, and manage my team effectively.”

Patient confidence

“Being able to use a mobile device in a patient’s home to update his or her records has increased patient confidence,” says Claire. “It’s a shared experience – patients can see the information being uploaded and ask questions there and then. They appreciate being part of the process and value being involved in decisions about their healthcare.”

William Lumb, a local GP involved in specifying and monitoring the project, says: “By enabling remote working, we are allowing staff to schedule more appointments in the community. They’re happier and are more likely to achieve a better work/life balance.

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Alison Nicholson, Clinical Lead for the Out of Hours Community Nursing Team, NHS Cumbria, says that the new system puts her in charge of her working day: “Working with the new mobile devices has given me the flexibility to work either ‘on the road’ or to complete unfinished records at home, using the time normally spent travelling back to the office. That means more time with my family – and a better work/life balance.”

Significant benefits

- Patient care has improved as community staff can access the latest information while on the move and patient records are always up to date
- Administration has been cut by 15% as staff don't lose time returning to their offices to collect patient records or update clinical and administration information
- Healthcare professionals have increased the number of patient appointments, without reducing the length of their visits
- Business continuity has improved as staff can work effectively from home even when bad weather prevents them from travelling, thanks to the Vodafone network
- Security requirements have been exceeded with connections between NHS Cumbria netbooks and the server, secure and compliant with the PCT's IT policies
- Patient confidence in the quality of the information held about them and the care they receive has increased
- Mileage covered by staff has reduced, lowering costs and promoting more environmentally friendly working practices

