

Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Trust IT Strategy paves the way to Foundation Trust status



The Trust's Challenge

In 2008, Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Trust (RSCH) started to prepare its application for Foundation Trust status. This required a review of the Trust's business strategy which in turn necessitated the preparation of a comprehensive IT strategy.

Common to all Trusts, RSCH has been required to submit annual IT strategy documents. The application for Foundation Trust status, however, demanded a more comprehensive roadmap for IT. The challenge was compounded by the fact that the Trust's IT outsource contract was terminating, and that vendor support was being withdrawn for the core Patient Administration System.

Business Context and Drivers

Hospitals are under increased scrutiny from patients, government and the media, with pressures from all sides to improve the experience and treatment of patients and to improve business efficiency while maintaining tight control over spending. RSCH is no exception. With plans to start the consultation process for Foundation Trust status, and with the inevitable public interest that this would generate, the Trust developed a set of ambitious plans to reinforce its position as a hospital which patients confidently choose to come to for treatment.

As part of this process, the Trust commissioned Change Management Group to assist with the creation of a comprehensive IT strategy - a key component of the integrated business plan which the Trust was required to submit as part of its application for Foundation Trust status.

Commenting on the appointment of Change Management Group, Sue Lewis, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Nursing and Operations says, "We were impressed with the professionalism of Change Management Group, their immediate grasp of what the project entailed and the methodical way in which they proposed to carry out and complete the work to a very short timescale."

Before the project could start, the Trust identified three business drivers which were to set the direction for the IT strategy: to ensure clinical process improvements; to improve patient outcomes, and to improve business efficiency.

Change Management Group reviewed these key business drivers together with the business processes and IT infrastructure and recommended a programme of IT developments that would improve day to day operations and support the delivery of the business strategy.

RSCH faced a number of key IT issues, which would need to be considered in the creation of a robust IT strategy. The IT organisation had been outsourced to a third party for several years and there were concerns that to continue with this structure would no longer be in the best interests of RSCH and its patients. Furthermore, RSCH faced a 'burning platform' with vendor support about to be withdrawn for its core Patient Administration System.

Change Management Group Approach

Change Management Group's approach was to create a small team of consultants with a range of skills including health service operational and IT experience, infrastructure and application knowledge and experience in developing and operating IT systems in the public and private sectors.

The team started by mapping the Trust's key business drivers and objectives and used this to develop the business operating model, covering the organisation's structure, processes, data and key user characteristics. In parallel, the team reviewed the current organisation, IT infrastructure, applications and service delivery model, to highlight the key issues and identify opportunities for improvement.

"The Change Management Group team completely took on board the fact that staff in a busy hospital cannot 'close for training' and planned one to one interviews with all key personnel rather than attempt to gather them all in one place. I was impressed with the 'can do' attitude of the Change Management Group team and their willingness to accommodate our way of working in order to get the job done," says Sue Lewis.

Outcomes

A high quality and comprehensive IT strategy document was delivered on time and budget. The strategy set out specific solutions for core application areas, including patient administration, radiology and pathology and provided a short-list of options for all other key application areas. The strategy set out clear recommendations for the IT organisation and provided a practical roadmap for implementing the strategy, including three development phases based on an analysis of priorities,

timescales, key dependencies, high-level resource estimates and the key delivery risks.

Following approval by the board, the RSCH management team immediately started the first phase of the strategy implementation, closely following the recommendations laid out by Change Management Group.

Improving business efficiency, ensuring clinical process improvements and improving patient outcomes

The Change Management Group team identified a number of concerns with the Trust's existing outsourced IT organisation which would all result in RSCH staff not receiving the appropriate quality of service – something that needed addressing quickly if the Trust was to achieve its business goals.

One of the success factors for the Trust is the delivery of safe and high quality care to all patients. The Change Management Group recommendations included changes to clinical systems, with excellent reporting provision to allow analysts to more easily spot trends and bottlenecks, and support clinical governance and audit requirements.

Change Management Group also recommended new IT technologies to support RSCH in ensuring patient safety and to ultimately improve patient outcomes; using bar codes to identify patients on admission and on their records and drugs could reduce the potential for any mismatch of data or intervention, and instrument tracking would enable the Trust to record and trace instruments to and from a theatre tray and record the stages through preparation, use and sterile cleansing.

Change Management Group advised that an integrated data warehouse and reporting system, where information is captured once and reports are easily accessible would improve management, statutory and clinical reporting. Over 60 separate databases and spreadsheets were being used at the Trust to generate management information and reporting. The move to an integrated data warehouse will ensure that all patient data across the Trust can be quickly and inexpensively aggregated for monthly reporting – a mandatory requirement from January 2009. Accurate, easily accessible data will also highlight bottlenecks and potential problems with the Trust's 18 week referral-to-treatment process.

"The IT Strategy suggested by Change Management Group has given RSCH a very clear sense of direction from an IT perspective and a well-defined, phased development plan for the delivery of the various elements of the proposal. We've entered 2009 with our consultation process for Foundation status well underway and a set of IT development targets that will undoubtedly enable us to achieve our business goals," concludes Sue Lewis.

About Royal Surrey County Hospital

The Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Trust is a leading District General Hospital serving a population of 320,000 for emergency and general hospital services and is the lead specialist centre for cancer patients in Surrey, West Sussex and Hampshire, serving a population of 1.2 million. RSCH has an extensive education, training and research portfolio and is a national leader in surgical training and laparoscopic surgery. With an annual income of £180 million, the hospital has 528 beds and 14 operating theatres and employs 2,800 staff. The hospital sees around 250,000 outpatients a year, 55,500 patients are admitted for treatment and over 59,000 patients attend the A&E department.

RSCH was awarded a rating of 'excellent' for the quality of its services in the Healthcare Commission's October 2008 Annual Health Check.

In November 2008, RSCH started its consultation on Foundation Trust Status, with a decision due in early 2009.

About Change Management Group

Change Management Group is a leading independent management consultancy specialising in the business improvement of customer service organisations.

Established for over 10 years, Change Management Group has a premium client base in healthcare, retail, transport & distribution and FMCG.

Change Management Group maintains a core team of respected industry leaders supported by a network of more than 800 associate consultants. This rich talent pool allows the assembly of the absolute best team for each assignment, whilst keeping overheads low and costs competitive. Most Change Management Group consultants have previously held senior positions in major organisations and can therefore speak from first hand experience.

By cross-fertilising best practice across relevant sectors Change Management Group brings a unique approach that adds value beyond the solution to an immediate technical challenge. For example, health trusts, retailers, and passenger transport companies can all learn from each other's experience how to enhance performance by improving the customer experience.

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