A pragmatic approach:

Scoping & Agreeing Systems for Complete Research Integration

CULTURE

CASE STUDY

Project Description

Clinical research is gaining momentum across the NHS and many more Trusts are now joining the charge to increase the amount of research conducted to generate better treatment options.

The reason for trusts wanting to get involved in research are five fold: it is high on the Government agenda, there is new leverage in the Health and Social Care Act, the NHS constitution, the NHS Operating Framework and the Mandate all now requiring the NHS to support research. As well as that, a recent Government MORI poll showed that seventy two per cent of people surveyed across the UK would want to be offered the chance to take part in a clinical trial if they had a health condition that was affecting their daily life.

As a result, more Trusts like Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust are becoming research active and looking for ways to embed research into 'core business'.

The DeNDRoN team in East Anglia decided to work with Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust to produce a research strategy and communications plan to tackle head on the issues and perceived barriers for the trust. As a result of the initiative the strategy has now been approved and is now ingrained in Board business and annual staff appraisals to monitor their progress.

For many NHS Trusts research is not seen as integral to health care planning and often occurs in small 'pockets' where individuals have actively encouraged others to get involved. It also more often then not, relies heavily on the enthusiasm of clinicians and rarely gets a mention at Board level. However with the tides turning, many are starting to question what research can do for them and their organisation.

We have seen that those that have become research active now attract more funding, entice higher profile applicants, and have earned themselves a reputation as a partner of choice for large-scale research. Growing evidence also suggests that research-active NHS organisations are more innovative, better at overall performance, provide more cost-effective treatments and open up opportunities for staff development.

For Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, they wanted to explore new ways they could embed research into their organisation, influence research activity and change clinicians perception of research as an option rather than an essential component of care. Maggie Wheeler, Chair of Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, says: "The project was extremely important to us, because a research active Trust attracts more research funding and better applicants to positions, which is in the best interests of the staff, service users and carers."

Calling others to take action

Before leaping ahead into the 'doing' stage, the DeNDRoN team realised that firstly a lot of work needed to be done to harness the support of senior leaders at the Trust.

Ann Luck, research network manager for East Anglia DeNDRoN pulled together a proposal for the Trust board to put forward the case for research.

Executive board members agreed that one of the key reasons as to why they embraced the initiative was due to the report proposal created by Ann Luck. Maggie Wheeler comments: "Having the report was very helpful as the Board is a diverse group of people and no one apart from the medical director is experienced in medical research. By spelling out the compelling reasons why the trust should get involved, it gave them the assurance needed to take forward the research agenda," explains Maggie.

Also part of the reason for its acceptance was the project was 'in the right place at the right time', as one of the Trust's annual objectives was to improve its research profile, according to the chair, Maggie Wheeler.

Practicalities

Taking a project management approach allowed the team to pragmatically think through all stages of the initiative. Through brainstorming ideas with the board, a research strategy and communications plan was produced and is now being implemented trust wide. Some of the practical ideas being implemented are listed in the column to the left.

Developing a tool to use in supervision

One of the primary methods to make staff at the Trust research aware was a tool to use during staff appraisals.

Ann Luck explains more; "We developed a tool to use in supervision to enable staff to increase their own research awareness. The table signposts people to 'surf' the web together as part of an action learning exercise. It also lists other actions the individual needs to take to progress from level 1 being basic understanding of research, through to 3 where staff will receive informed consent training and begin to support the delivery of studies. As the person progresses they develop new skills and knowledge. So far the tool has been warmly received by clinicians and is now being rolled out trust wide with the support of the board," explains Ann.

Maggie Wheeler, explains why this was chosen "We really wanted all staff to get involved even if they aren't going to move on to become researchers. At the least by achieving level 1 status it will result in improving and increasing people's understanding."

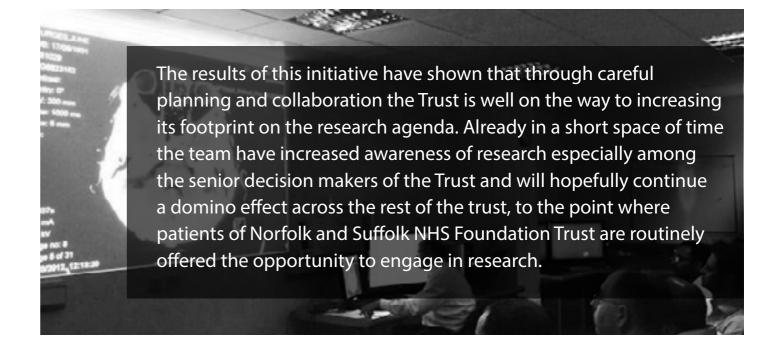## Get the research and development department on board

The DeNDRoN network also worked closely with the research and development department and through collaborative efforts the results have been positive.

Research manager Bonnie Teague said: "getting the R&D department on board is vital for anyone embarking on a project like this as it is very collaborative. For us it really helped that DeNDRoN and the Trust were both singing from the same hymn sheet. Part of the reason it has worked so well is that it is the right time for it, and the Trust was very open to the idea of research being embedded in the culture of the Trust. It was all down to communication and talking to as many people as possible."

Andrew Tarbuck added: "Through a lot of ongoing discussions with people, and the involvement of our Research & Development (R&D) manager, we have made research visible and had it included into the annual appraisal. The trust board have been very positive and are now fully committed towards research."

Practical Implementation

- Surveying research awareness in clinical staff caring for people with dementia

- Making research a Trust requirement for all new staff inductions

- Developing a tool to use in clinical supervision and documenting this activity

- Implementing the research awareness communications strategy

- Developing a dementia research register for patients interested in research studies

Change presents new opportunities

When Norfolk and Waveney Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust and Suffolk Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust merged in January 2012 it underwent a period of radical redesign of services. Ann Luck, research network manager and project manager for this initiative said: "Previously it has been difficult to engage very busy clinicians in research because of this transition period. However the team also saw this change open up opportunities to integrate research into their new care pathways and engage with clinicians."

However, keeping people's interest up at a time when clinical services were and continue to be squeezed was a challenge, admits Dr Andrew Tarbuck "To achieve this we went around the clinical teams telling people about the initiative and kept it very visible."

Ann Luck added: "By starting with the board and gaining their support, clinicians then followed. Enthusiasm grew and many more became engaged with us and through the strategy I'm confident more staff will continue to offer the choice of participation in research to their patients".

The results of this initiative have shown that through careful planning and collaboration the Trust is well on the way to increasing its footprint on the research agenda. Already in a short space of time the team have increased awareness of research especially among the senior decision makers of the Trust and will hopefully continue a domino effect across the rest of the trust, to the point where patients of Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust are routinely offered the opportunity to engage in research.

PATIENTS IN RESEARCH

Tips

- Identify the stakeholders and the key people who will make it happen

- Get agreement on the plan from all the relevant stakeholders

- Put forward a proposal to the Trust board to put forward the case for research

- Book appointments with the chief executive. Providing a brief report which includes the financial benefits of research engagement will help

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