

A new model for leaner working

across the North West LRN

Project Description

The Dementias and Neurodegenerative Diseases Research Network (DeNDRoN) North West covers 5,500 square miles and a population of over seven million. The Network works with 24 NHS Trusts and has a current portfolio of 38 studies covering dementia, Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease and Huntington's disease. The graph below shows the Network's growth since 2007.

For the past six years, the Network has been funded by the NIHR through the core budget and additional funding provided via the partner Comprehensive Local Research Networks (CLRNs): Greater Manchester, Cumbria and Lancashire and Cheshire and Merseyside. There has been no significant increase in funding over this time and thus no significant increases in staff. Due to the geographical size of the Network and number of sites and studies involved, the Network needs to ensure that all ways of working are as efficient as possible to also ensure that the demands of the portfolio are met, with all studies delivered to time and to target.

The Leaner Working project was of real benefit to the Network. It encouraged them to capture quantitative, accurate data which in turn helped them focus on developing alternative recruitment strategies that would maintain their patient accrual whilst encouraging staff to work more efficiently.



INTEGRATION

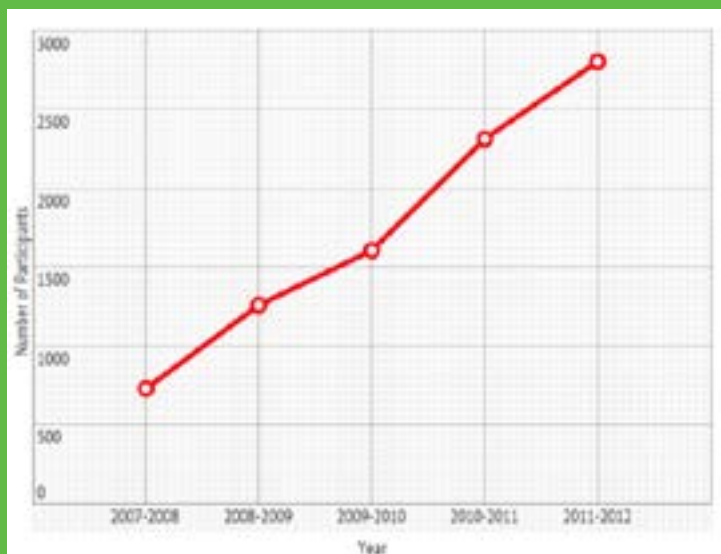
CASE STUDY

Prior to the start of the Leaner Working project, the Network carried out the majority of its patient recruitment by attaching staff to specialist memory assessment and specialist and general neurology clinics across the North West. Whilst this was successful in recruiting patients, it required a high level of input and resource.

Upon the Network's initiation, the limited research infrastructure within the North West meant both patient visits post recruitment as well as attendance at clinics for recruitment purposes were necessary in order to deliver its portfolio projects. The Leaner Working project gave the Network the opportunity to look at how it could better achieve a balance between recruitment activities and follow up patient visits in order to meet the increasing demands of the portfolio.

The Prime Minister's Challenge of March 2012 set a target to involve 10% of patients with dementia in some form of research. This renewed national focus on dementia meant there was a strong pipeline of dementia studies emerging, and it was evident that the Network would have to accommodate this increase in studies in 2012/13 within its available funding, whilst increasing recruitment.

In short, the Network realised it had to work 'leaner' in order to meet its performance targets.



Participants recruited to portfolio studies 2007-2012. The LRN has grown recruitment since its inception, maintaining momentum despite no growth in funding.

Process

An improved and more detailed reporting document was designed for all research staff in clinics to complete on a weekly basis to help inform decisions around resource planning. This asked questions such as time staff spent at clinics, the number of patients seen by the clinician, the number of eligible patients at the clinic, the number of patients approached and the number recruited.

The data was collected over a three month period (Jan-Apr 2012). The results showed which clinics saw a positive effect

in recruitment due to staff attendance, and which clinics saw limited recruitment to studies, thereby demonstrating which were most cost effective for staff to attend.

In the case of cost inefficiency the team questioned which different types of recruitment strategies the Network should employ instead. The new strategies included pre-screening clinics and strengthening relationships with clinic staff to ensure that if clinics weren't attended in person, a clinical colleague could pass on the research information for the Network team to follow up. Some of these changes were then implemented and captured over another three months from Apr-July 2012.

The whole Network team was involved with the project and it highlighted the importance of collaboration, as the project team relied heavily on nurses and clinical studies officers consistently and accurately completing the weekly clinic diaries.

“The whole project was a really useful experience. I feel that I’ve built up stronger working relationships with the team and that we’ve made a lot of progress in terms of making the North West network as efficient as possible”
Adam Kennedy, Clinical Studies Officer

Impact of the project

The project means that DeNDRoN North West is now prioritising the clinics where it knows it can definitely recruit significant numbers of patients. “We are now recruiting more people and we are taking research out to areas where it hasn't been before,” says Adam Kennedy, Clinical Studies Officer.

This data showed how efficient each clinic is and whether it was worthwhile for the team to be in a particular clinic. For example, it could be that 95% of patients weren't eligible for a study and we were sometimes unnecessarily sending three staff to one clinic.

“This exercise really showed us whether it was worthwhile and whether it was an effective use of our time. The nurses did have a feel for how the clinics were working but this gave us quantifiable data,” says Adam.

There can be a trend to recruit from all clinics all of the time but this study showed this approach doesn't always work. Adam adds, “The information we gathered also showed us if we should pull staff out of a clinic. For example, one of the clinics we had been recruiting from had become saturated and so therefore it was not necessary for us to keep attending.”

Engaging nurses and clinical staff

Trying to change how people work is always a challenge. To combat this, the project team held presentations to inform staff and were as transparent as possible so everyone could understand the reasons behind the changes, as Lynne Owen, Network Manager explains: “We have a very mobile and flexible workforce. We spent a lot of time talking to staff and establishing relationships so we could work leaner and recruit at a faster pace. The project helped to explain why these changes were taking place, and also proved that we could work in a leaner and more effective way.

“The area we cover is geographically huge and we try to keep nurses as close to their base as possible. They do have to travel sometimes but if they understand why they're much more flexible. It is all about being transparent.”

Lead research nurse Emma Oughton, who supports all the Network nurses working in the Greater Manchester area, commented, “Now we can plan our visits better and not waste time and money. The changes have been a good idea and have ensured we are not just sitting in clinics and not actively recruiting.”

“We knew we needed to be more cost effective and we accept it is part of the Government's remit to save money, so anything we can do to achieve this is good. Nationally that is an objective the staff are well aware of, within each Trust,” adds Emma.

Working leaner

Since the team commenced work on the project, DeNDRoN North West has had a very strong year in terms of recruitment as Angie Parker, Network manager explains, “We haven't had any additional resources yet we have been able to take on more work. We will continue working in this way.”

Angie adds, “It is not rocket science, it was just about saying there is a better way of working and we have evidence for why that is.”

The Network has continued to capture this data since the project ended so we can continue to ensure that we can generate additional capacity to resource new studies that are added to our portfolio.



PATIENTS IN RESEARCH

Tips

- Be transparent with staff so they can see the reason behind the changes in working
- Ensure you have someone in charge of collecting the data
- Be open minded and take on the board what the data tells you in terms of making changes
- Make the nurses part of the decision making as that will make them want to achieve more if they feel they are part of it
- Show the staff there are ways of making them even more successful



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