

NHS England directive to improve wheelchair services and meet user needs.

Innovative integration of wheelchair services



NHS Hillingdon and NHS Harrow Clinical Commissioning Groups

NHS Hillingdon Clinical Commissioning Group (NHS Hillingdon) and NHS Harrow Clinical Commissioning Group (NHS Harrow) approached NHS Shared Business Services (NHS SBS) to help transform their service for wheelchair users and improve patient care.

The challenge

Wheelchair services have been under the spotlight in recent years, and discussions at two NHS England national summits made it clear that the commissioning and provision of wheelchair services needed to improve.

At the time the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) approached NHS SBS to support a procurement for the service, NHS Hillingdon and NHS Harrow were working with two separate suppliers; an NHS Provider and a subcontracted third party. One supplier provided assessment and prescribing services and a second subcontractor was responsible for the modification, maintenance and repair of wheelchairs.

This route resulted in a service that was struggling, with long lead times, slow response to issues, lack of routine maintenance and out-of-hours support in crisis situations.

Existing service specifications had few, tangible performance measures and were managed as part of a 'block' contract with little visibility of either activity or costs, and no patient/ service user or carer feedback for effective evaluation and performance management.

Patient care was considered substandard and impacted other NHS services. Many patients requiring wheelchair services endured extended stays in hospital or were discharged 'bed-bound' due to the lack of equipment available short-term to support them at home.

To add to the procurement challenge, before the contract was put out to tender, the NHS Provider served the CCGs with a decommissioning notice. This created intense time pressure in terms of sourcing a new provider.

Key points

- Client:** NHS Hillingdon and NHS Harrow Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Project:** Wheelchair services improvement
- Timeframe:** November 2015
- Result:** Anticipated savings in excess of £500,000 over the first two-years of the contract.
 - High quality service through a single supplier.
 - Consolidated stock at one site for improved management and audit.
 - Collaborative working between the supplier, NHS SBS, both CCGs and Clinical Services.
 - Better patient care that improves the quality of life for adults and children, allowing them to fully integrate into society.
 - Project delivered within tight timescales.

Access to data for benchmarking was also a huge obstacle for the procurement as no central information was held relating to volume, expenditure, access to or patient experience of wheelchair services.

The solution

To ensure short-term continuity of service and patient care whilst a full procurement was undertaken, the CCGs,

with guidance from NHS SBS, contracted directly with the subcontractor.

NHS SBS and both CCGs then undertook an extensive information gathering process, involving feedback and engagement activities such as public workshops for wheelchair users and carers. This, together with a detailed value for money exercise, indicated that there were significant operational, quality and financial benefits to procuring a new service.

Clear and timely communication was key to keeping project timescales on track, and weekly meetings were established between NHS SBS and the NHS Hillingdon Commissioner who took the lead on behalf of the two CCGs, ensuring a rapid solution to any challenges.

To deliver the objective of improved wheelchair services, NHS SBS proposed an innovative, fully integrated service delivered by one supplier across the two CCGs as the best way to deliver value and improve the support for wheelchair users.

The integrated solution was seen as a way to reduce huge time inefficiencies inherent in the dual supplier system. It was hoped that by improving the process and streamlining the service that timescales would be reduced and waiting times improved.

The result

Adopting a single supplier with ownership of the whole service pathway, from assessment to delivery, effectively streamlined the service, which is now seamless from a patient's perspective.

The new integrated service allows the CCGs to meet patients' needs faster and more efficiently, improving the quality of life for hundreds of adults and children - letting them fully integrate into society.

The supplier works collaboratively and proactively with NHS SBS, the CCG's and Clinical Services. Feedback from staff working within the new service demonstrates that progress is being made to reduce the backlog created by the previous providers.

User feedback has also been positive, with GP's saying this solution allows them to better understand the patients' pathway through wheelchair services.

Importantly, there have also been no formal patient complaints received since the integrated service was introduced.

A key driver behind the integrated solution was the assumption that a single supplier would deliver cost savings and reduce the annual expenditure of the CCGs. The anticipated saving is expected to be in excess of £500k over the first two years of the contract.

The new provider is delivering a high quality, reliable service, with stock consolidated onto one site; improving stock management and audit.

With the involvement of NHS England, the NHS SBS procurement team believe that their initial work with NHS Harrow and NHS Hillingdon in outlining an innovative integrated service will have a wider influence and could encourage other Clinical Commissioning Groups adopt the approach.

The NHS SBS Procurement team is currently using the learning acquired from this procurement to benefit North West London, a group of seven CCGs: NHS Barnet, NHS Brent, NHS Central London, NHS West London, NHS Hounslow, NHS Ealing and NHS Hammersmith and Fulham.

Within a defined evaluation process a range of models are user tested and assessed for longevity, these are then weighted against the initial purchase cost to create a database containing a wide range of proven, suitable products. Standardising and updating the stock offering in this way not only helps to control costs, but also allows the CCGs to provide flexibility and a wider variety of equipment that better fits user needs.

The new service also uniquely provides for out-of-hours issues and offers a much shorter time from referral to assessment/supply than previously specified (from 14 weeks down to 5 days in some cases); all within the context of a financially more economic service that reduces overall costs to the CCGs by more than £500k.

The new integrated service demonstrates a real advance as it provides equity of access and a common service specification across the two CCG areas where previously significant inequalities and differences existed.

Mark Eaton – AD Transformation at NHS Hillingdon says: “Our patients will benefit from a new, fully integrated service, which focusses on meeting the patient’s needs quicker, improving their quality of life and helping them fully integrate in to society.”