The Future of Acute Hospital Services in Worcestershire

NHS Arden & GEM Commissioning Support Unit (CSU) is leading the delivery of a major reconfiguration of acute hospital services across Worcestershire, South Birmingham and Warwickshire. In addition to the programme leadership, we are responsible for delivering a comprehensive communications and stakeholder engagement strategy, to ensure those affected understand the need for change and make a meaningful contribution to the reconfiguration.

We are working in partnership with key stakeholders (including local MPs and councillors, press groups and Healthwatch) to maintain an open dialogue with all interested parties, and engage effectively with the public and patients as the programme continues.

The Challenge

The findings of the ‘Joint Services Review – Reconfiguration Programme’ into the provision of acute hospital services in Worcestershire, outlined the need for a major reconfiguration across two sites, to maintain high quality clinical standards across the health economy. The Joint Services Review concluded after 18 months, in April 2013, without agreement on an outline clinical model. During this period a number of pressure groups had become active, with support from local MPs, fighting both the closures and the perceived failure to engage by the reconfiguration programme.

NHS Arden & GEM CSU was invited to restart the programme, and with the support of NHS England, we led an intensive period of engagement between both local NHS bodies and local stakeholders. Previous difficulties had raised the profile of the earlier reconfiguration programme such that it had attracted national interest. As a result, having a strong and effective communications and engagement strategy was essential to support the leadership of the programme.

Operating in a politically sensitive environment, with the added pressure of a general election on the horizon, this programme is intense public scrutiny at every stage.

Our Approach

We developed a communications strategy, which sought to proactively engage with pressure groups, the wider public and stakeholders. Providing transparency, understanding and, most importantly, accountability to the wider stakeholder community was critical in reducing the concerns about the programme.

Working closely with our communications and engagement colleagues in each of the CCGs, we conducted an extensive stakeholder mapping exercise designed to establish who needed to know what, when, across those communities that would be effected by the change. Drawing on the

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CCGs’ knowledge of local communities, interest groups, and other communications channels, we were able to develop a comprehensive database of groups and individuals with whom we would need to prioritise contact and knowledge sharing. This work was supported by the development of ‘heat maps’ which showed geographically where patients originated from (across Worcestershire, South Birmingham, Warwickshire and Herefordshire).

We then identified 25 representatives from the range of organisations directly involved in or impacted by the reconfiguration programme to create a group of key stakeholders (including those pressure groups that had campaigned against the reconfiguration). To support the agenda of transparency, the CCGs appointed an independent lay chair. The programme formalised this relationship, creating a sub-committee of the main programme board, with the chair on behalf of the sub-committee reporting on a monthly basis to the programme board.

Outcomes
Through developing face-to-face contacts, the programme has regained the trust of the public and wider stakeholder communities. By bringing together an independent clinical review panel, the programme has been able to articulate a clinical model for Worcestershire for the first time in five years, and through effective engagement, has been able to ensure that this approach has had widespread support.

The work of the sub-committee has been able to shape the development of the programme and provide accountability and transparency which has been recognised by all parts of the health economy. Healthwatch and the pressure groups have been strong supporters of the approach which have allowed a step change in the way in which the programme is perceived.

The thorough and practical approach adopted by NHS Arden & GEM CSU has enabled this complex and challenging project to proceed efficiently, ensuring that stakeholders are fully engaged in the process and that appropriate governance is embedded in every aspect of the project. “

David Williams, Director of Performance and Delivery, NHS England Area Team - Arden, Hereford and Worcestershire

I am pleased with how the team from Arden & GEM CSU working on the Future of Acute Hospital services in Worcestershire programme has set up a public and patient sub-committee to offer assurance on the public and patient engagement process. The team has made an effort to involve all key stakeholder groups in this process.

Peter Pinfield, Chair, Healthwatch Worcestershire

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