Response to NHS Chief Executive’s Open Call for Evidence and Ideas

Respondent ID: 6

Organisation name: Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust

Type of response: Email and separate document
How to help promote and accelerate the adoption and spread of innovation throughout the NHS: One initiative.

Name: Thomas Hughes
Job Title: Clinical Research Administrative Assistant/ Research Technician
Email: Thomas.hughes@colchesterhospital.nhs.uk
Tel: 01206 745246

Organisation: Colchester Hospital University Foundation Trust (CHUFT)/ Essex & Hertfordshire CLRN

Initiative

Research and Development within the NHS is still a relatively new concept and much of what CLRN’s do is inspired by what commercial companies did before us. Newer still to the NHS is the idea that our staff can be innovative and be supported in making their ideas a reality.

The current system for innovation within the NHS does a lot to help generate ideas, realise ideas and to sell ideas. Now I am aware I may be pointing out the obvious to you but the differences between us and other companies begins to become apparent when the innovation stops.

The problem at the minute stems from the way the innovation teams operate and more locally the way research and innovation offices and innovation scouts work. Although there are people employed to sell the ideas for monetary profit and to make people aware of the innovations, currently there is not a lot of people employed to “sell” the ideas to the people who would actually be using them.

It is all very good showing people how great an innovation is but without anyone constantly going on about a new process or a new device there is little to no hope of it catching on.

Imagine for a minute, what would happen if a group of case studies were to be carried out on a site level (for example Colchester General Hospital as opposed to the whole of the CHUFT Trust) across all of the NHS trusts. I would wager that sites where an individual has come up with a good idea and had it brought to fruition, have adopted the process or the technology at a much quicker rate than the national average.

Rather than being a mystery this is obviously because within that area someone has managed to bring a lot more than just an idea to the table. They have talked about it with passion, presented it to their peers and have been there to constantly promote it.

My proposal is quite simple, although it could prove to be quite costly. Employ people to promote the ideas locally, and by locally I mean on site as much as possible. Certainly cut costs by getting them to cover an area, but be realistic about it. Find good solid examples of instances where innovations have been adopted quickly across a tight cluster of sites and learn from them.

Deploy these “Innovation Agents” strategically but do not make them road warriors. By having an NHS marketing team working in the same hospital as the people who are potentially going to be using the innovation we will be able to force the process along at a much quicker rate and will be able to “sell” these ideas to much more individuals.

We could learn a lot from the way drug companies promote their drugs with representatives employed to promote one specific drug each. At the same time though, we have an opportunity to develop a whole new role which will benefit the NHS professionally and more importantly it will be able to contribute positively to the overall patient experience.
The power of marketing is constantly being overlooked by the NHS and if the company is serious about continuing to compete with its commercial counter-parts then it has to start getting tougher.

It seems silly that the NHS can spend millions of pounds a year developing innovations which will definitely improve patient healthcare, then take the “hand holding” approach of getting people to make the transition. If the NHS is to remain in its current form it needs to become much more confident with its staff, people will always resist change if they are given a choice.

The easiest way to remove choice without facing resistance is to constantly encourage and teach individuals, which will require a whole new breed of workers to join the NHS. There is still no better way to force a change than by launching a large scale charm offensive…..Think bankers/ estate agents.