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

Respondent ID: 45

Organisation name: Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital

Type of response: Email
Dear Sir,

Thanks for asking my opinion on speeding up the adoption of innovation within the NHS.

I am a practising histopathologist, also have a degree in healthcare management and have made several innovations, some of them gained award at the regional innovation competition. In this aspect, I have some experience about the pathways and obstacles of spreading innovations within the NHS.

In order to diffuse the innovations, first they have to be adopted. The major obstacle at Trust level is probably lack of understanding of the problems and suggested solutions. There is potential role for 'translators' who are able to translate the innovations between the different stakeholders; these could be people with a range of skills, eg. bridging between IT, medical professional sand management etc.

Let me give an example: a few years ago there was a suggestion made at our Trust that instead of creating monster patient databases from all of our systems - we need a solution to gather patient data on the fly from the existing systems, as and when needed. This would have eliminated the need for maintaining and updating yet one more central database - providing instant access to all relevant patient data - as and when needed. This idea did not get through the management structure and did not even get a trial - despite a proof of concept experiment was successful.

There should be a need to implement an innovation: if the need is not present, or not recognised, the innovation is not implemented.

An example of this process: innovative use of histopathology slide scanning technology and conferencing software to help overstretched MDMs and regional meetings was not even looked at by the management - even when a business case/bid was assembled - the approach however has radically changed when a regional reorganisational need required an innovative telepathology solution, and we had the opportunity to try this in practice.

The first step to help spreading innovations should happen at Trust levels with finding an appropriate individual, who understands, helps and champions the innovations; this individual has to have the credibility and the resources to make it happen.

Secondly, despite the very useful internet availabilities, the Expo and other innovative ways of spreading ideas, most people do not know what are the innovations available. Therefore I would like to propose an implementation of a (probably web-based) intellectual marketplace of ideas, a "problems and solutions warehouse" - where innovators can showcase/exchange their ideas. This could be include ideas and innovations at different level of their development: concepts, proof of concepts, implemented ideas, adopted an developed ideas etc. This approach would generate interest, would provide access. The potentially good ideas, which could not be implemented at one place or another, could be developed further and impelmented where the resources available similar to the concept of the Medical Hypotheses journal).

Thirdly, incentivising the innovations might be beneficial - the Trusts which are innovative could get more resources and the innovators need to be also rewarded. However, it is important to recognise the successful implementers as well.

One has to make it clear: what is in it for the innovators? The most important gain would be the prestige and kudos related to a successful innovation; also, if their idea generates income, financial rewards could be introduced.

It would be useful to leverage on the power of social networking in spreading innovations -
word of mouth is a very powerful way of disseminating innovations.

Also, better understanding of the innovation process would lead to enhanced roll out - finding the potential future users at the point of innovation might be a very useful enhancer - i.e. approaching the managers of similar NHS units, and letting them know about a possible solution/innovation.

I hope you will find some useful ideas in the above, if any clarification or additional information needed, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

dr Laszlo Igali
Consultant Histopathologist