

How to Effectively Communicate with your NHS Membership Community

Article Summary

Communicating with the local society is a vital element in attaining and keeping NHS Foundation Trust status. Through the use of membership management software, NHS trusts are able to take advantage of the benefits of email as a communication device; this piece of writing explains what those benefits are, and how they can be used in conjunction with an NHS focussed membership management software solution to enhance communication and patient care.

Article Body

In 2004, The Health Service Ombudsman, Ann Abraham, reported that a lot of the complaints brought against the NHS were brought on by poor communication by health service staff. In consequence of this, recommendations were implemented to try to enhance the levels of communication between the NHS trusts and their local community members.

Since then, NHS Foundation Trusts and aspiring trusts have been trying to their levels of communication with a precise focus on the methods of communication they make use of. Never-ending technological developments mean that community members can now be contacted by a range of tools. For example, contacting teens regarding STD check-ups via letter has shown to not be nearly as successful as contacting them through mobile text messaging (SMS). On the other hand, contacting elderly patients in the community via SMS is would most certainly have a very poor response rate!

In order to obtain Foundation Trust status, NHS Trusts must be able to provide evidence to Monitor that they have a well rounded membership base and that they are able to communicate successfully with all demographic groups. Along with communicating with the external community, trusts must be able to provide adequate internal communication also. An example of inadequate internal communication which led to a complaint in 2004 was case E.712/01-02 about the care of a lady who, during the course of less than four weeks in hospital, was under the care of:

- 3 locum consultant geriatricians,
- one substantive consultant geriatrician and
- a shifting group of more junior medical staff

There were no adequate provisions in place for the handover of the woman's care from one consultant to another, and not one individual member of staff took accountability for reviewing the



care plan as the woman's condition changed; this led almost inevitably to sub-standard care being given.

In order to avoid complaints arising from inadequate communication and to help improve the level of care provided to patients, NHS trusts are now turning to technology to help control internal and external communication, and with its help can choose and control from a range of communication mediums.

Healthcare Membership Management software solutions can help trusts:

- Select the most suitable method of communication for precise member groups
- Produce and deliver the message and
- Track and control the responses and follow up

Example Communication Method: Email

The first ever piece of email was programmed and sent in 1971 by Ray Tomlinson. Extensive use by the public started in the early 1990s and rapidly grew to the degree that email now represents an essential part of daily life for about 70% of the UK population.

There are many benefits of using email as a communication tool in the NHS:

Convenience

- An email can be sent and received anytime, anywhere (internet connecting pending) in a matter of seconds
- Email can be used to send information to patients that they would generally have to write down by hand - i.e. addresses, phone numbers, advice and instructions on prescriptions, pre and post-operative guidance etc
- Emails are not generally limited in terms of length or size. Also it is straightforward to forward added digital records as attachments

Access

- It may be a lot easier to contact those with disabilities or people living in remote areas with email
- There is an amplified opportunity for information sharing. When the recent Swine Flu pandemic swept the UK, emails with guidance on how to reduce the spread of the disease were sent out from the NHS, but they were forwarded on by community members to a wider audience (their other friends and family)
- Many may find email quicker and more comfortable tool to use when reporting objectionable incidents or placing a criticism

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- It enables patients to talk about and forward content of messages with family members or friends to help improve their understanding

Satisfaction

- Email can often be seen as a more relaxed manner of communication and as such, might prompt community members to boost their rate of conversation and boost the level of communication intimacy
- Email can also offer a level of anonymity which can be a welcomed attribute at specific times
- The speed of email communication makes it a desired option for many
- It can be very useful to contact community members that are traditionally tricky to connect with by conventional face-to-face contact

Quality of Care

- Doctors and other health professionals can consult with other people before creating and sending emails to provide a more considered approach
- Email generates a written record of consultations and can prevent potential problems of scrawled handwritten notes (doctors are after all famous for their handwriting!)

Efficiency

- Health professionals can use email to send one message to numerous (sometimes hundreds or thousands) community members at one time
- Email can give some immense potential cost savings. Email is often viewed as an attractive, low cost substitute to posting letters to patients.

Using a membership management software solution built specifically for the NHS enables trusts to manage their email communication with ease, helping to enhance the effectiveness of the growth and recruitment campaigns by:

- Targeting, recruiting and increasing new community members
- Developing and managing active membership involvement
- Personalising and grouping members
- Defining level of membership involvement
- Developing partnership and stakeholder engagement
- Giving appropriate information to sustain amplified membership and bigger levels of involvement with trusts
- Improving the outcomes of partnerships to maximise joint working and financial benefits
- Making certain change has positive outcomes for both staff and patients
- Continuously growing, sustaining and retaining membership communities



Allowing your members to have a say encourages active participation on both sides and can help to form a better community.

Resource Box

The Community Involvement Solution for the NHS is part of the portfolio of solutions from Silverbear Ltd. The Community Involvement Solution assists existing and aspiring NHS Foundation Trusts to attain retail and maintain their membership engagement strategy, ensuring they meet the requirements set out by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).