

UCLH transforms patient care; new system reduces time for patients to get treatment



ABOUT UCLH

University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (UCLH) is one of the most complex NHS trusts in the United Kingdom. It has an annual turnover of 600 million. In 2009 UCLH was rated the best performing NHS Foundation Trust in the country.

THE CHALLENGE

The government had brought in new guidelines for patient care. From the time a GP decided to refer his patient to hospital to the day treatment began, the wait could be no longer than 18 weeks.

UCLH covers seven hospitals, with half a million patients seeking specialised healthcare, and 100,000 in-patients every year. For a busy Trust like UCLH, the 18-week rule was a tough ask. Due to the specialist nature of their hospitals, half their patients would have already been seen by a local hospital, meaning the 18-week timescale had already started ticking away.

The existing process was to track UCLH patients manually. To meet the 18-week target they would have had to take on hundreds of extra staff. This was not a feasible option.

In short, UCLH needed a system that would identify patients before the timeline was breached. It would specially mark them for progressing promptly to meet the new targets.

Patients and their families have to work their way through a myriad of processes to get treated. For example, a patient may need to have an x-ray done before he sees an orthopaedic consultant. There need to be checks in place to ensure the x-ray is scheduled to happen before the other appointment. He may miss the appointment, meaning he turns up without his x-ray, thus wasting the orthopaedic appointment. The more complicated the treatment, the more potential blockages to the timely treatment of the patient. Various departments and systems need to coordinate the patient's progress. All these had to be brought together by the new system.

Whilst change was essential, at the same time UCLH did not want the ways of working to change too much. Staff would continue using clinical and other existing systems. The transition had to be smooth and gradual.

As their managed service partner, we quickly understood what UCLH needed. "Logica's knowledge of our existing processes helped ensure we could achieve this without comprehensive retraining and allowed us to make the most of the investment in our current clinical databases," says James Thomas.

"We can now focus on continuous improvements in patient care as we have an accurate picture of where processes could be improved to ensure we meet the 18-week deadline. This will reduce wastage in the system and improve our ability to respond to the changing needs of patient treatment."

James Thomas, Director of ICT, UCLH

Key benefits

- UCLH is not only saving costs but time too. Processes are simpler, standardised - helping patients and consultants alike.
- Patient care is improved – well in line with the 18-week target.
- Patient information is readily available – reduces time to address bottlenecks; treatment progresses smoothly.



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OUR ANSWER

First we studied how the business would deal with the changes and what the users' needs were. This gave an idea of potential issues and training required.

UCLH and Logica then carried out pilots on two different areas of clinical practice. If a patient was being treated in either of these areas, what did his treatment pathway look like? Mappings were made using business process management (BPM) software. This done, how was the patient's progress being checked? Was it within the 18-week target? To track this regularly, an activity monitoring element was introduced.

A SUCCESS STORY

After a successful pilot in 2008, the system has been live across UCLH for a long time. Things have changed for the better. For instance, using our above example of the orthopaedic patient - now the system will say whether an appointment has been made for the x-ray and whether he turned up for it. If not, it sends an email alert to the person responsible for appointments. The patient meets the consultant with all the proper scans and tests. It is now easier for the doctor to decide on the correct course of treatment within Government guidelines.

Dr. Stein concludes, "Since Logica took over the management of ICT services in UCLH, the systems have been extremely reliable and we have had overall an exceptional quality of service. I do not know of any other hospital that I work in where the systems have functioned anywhere as reliably or efficiently as here."

"I've worked with a number of individuals in Logica who have been highly innovative and creative and have done a great deal to enhance the in-house development of ICT systems and that's something that I have not seen in any other organisation that I have worked in."

Dr. Robert Stein, PhD FRCP, Medical Oncologist, UCLH NHS Trust

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