

Harnessing the Power of Data to Navigate NHS Change

Oli Hudson, of Wilmington Healthcare, explains how business intelligence providers have a key role to play in helping customers understand the implications of the NHS Long-term Plan.

At the start of 2019, the NHS set out its priorities in its 'Long-term Plan', which aims to ensure that the additional funding announced last year, to mark its 70th birthday, is spent wisely during the next decade.

According to the plan, by April 2021, all areas of England will be covered by an Integrated Care System (ICS), which will see one provider or a group of providers responsible for all the healthcare needs of a defined population.

This integrated approach represents a seismic change in the way that NHS services will be organised, and budgets spent. Added to this, there is significant variation in the progress of local health economies in delivering integrated care to date.

This situation is bringing significant challenges to business intelligence providers which must track these changes and analyse their impact in order to provide customers with the wealth of new data and insight they need to engage with the NHS.

Mapping variation

The Long-term Plan validated the work of health systems in England that have already become ICSs. However, for many health economies, particularly those in financial recovery, it signalled the start of a journey towards a very different style of working.

This means that health systems across England now have very diverse needs and priorities, and they require an increasingly tailored approach from their suppliers.

Consequently, it is important for healthcare intelligence providers to segment health systems, as well as map the variety of new stakeholders who are becoming part of the decision-making mix in new integrated care organisations.

Understanding ICSs

Even within the first wave of 14 ICSs, there are varying levels of sophistication with a handful of high-fliers leading the way. These advanced systems are exploring contracts with a greater element of risk share between providers and commissioners allowing for more integrated working. Indeed, they are setting the standards that all other health systems are expected to emulate within the next few years.

One such ICS is Dorset, whose Chief System Integration Officer, Dr Phil Richardson, was guest speaker at a recent Wilmington Healthcare webinar on the NHS Long-term Plan. During the webinar, Phil explained how Dorset ICS runs "a family budgeting system", where money has already moved from one organisation to another to achieve balance across the system.

Poised for change

The majority of ICSs are not yet delivering fully integrated care, although they are preparing to do so; hence change must be closely monitored. In common with all Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs), ICSs have certain areas that they must focus on under the Long-term Plan, such as diabetes, cancer and respiratory disease.

It is important to identify what is happening in these areas and other key work-streams and the people who are leading them. It is also key to find out where other transformation work is occurring within individual ICSs.

Starting the integrated care journey

Health economies that are embarking on integrated care strategies are required to detail how this will happen, so it is essential to keep abreast of the local plans that they are required to publish in accordance with the Long-term Plan. Intelligence also needs to be gathered to identify the clinical leaders who are tasked with managing transformation and who will be leading workstreams.

From a financial perspective, it is important to understand that making direct cost savings is currently a priority for these health economies as their budgets sit in silos. However, reducing system costs across the whole pathway is the driver for future change.

Primary care transformation

Another key change so far in 2019 has been the introduction of Primary Care Networks (PCNs), which involve groups of GP practices collaborating locally with community services, social care and other health and care service providers.

PCNs will pave the way for ICSs to be formed in every part of the country. They will also help the NHS to fulfil other key objectives outlined in the Long-term Plan. It is essential to understand how PCNs operate and identify the leaders within them.

Conclusion

To capitalise on opportunities within the NHS, suppliers need to know where ICSs and STPs are in their integrated care journey; identify their priorities and transformation goals and understand the challenges they face in delivering them.

Business intelligence providers have a critical role to play in gathering the detailed information that customers need to keep abreast of changes within the NHS and tailor their sales and marketing strategies appropriately.

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