Overview

In 2018, the North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (NEAS) successfully piloted body-worn video cameras after the number of reported physical assaults on staff had increased by 23 per cent. The trust worked in partnership with trade unions and operational staff, which was pivotal to the success of the pilot.

Key benefits and outcomes

Since implementing the body-worn cameras NEAS has seen a positive impact:

- There has been improved reporting and less acceptance of violence and aggression towards staff.
- Staff using body worn cameras have reported that the devices have deterred acts of violence and aggression.
- NEAS has seen overarching public support and disbelief that staff are subjected to violence as part of their role.
- Ambulance crews feel valued that the trust has their health, safety and wellbeing as a number one priority. This provides a direct correlation to highly engaged staff, leading to better patient care.

What the organisation faced

Violence and aggression faced by NHS staff continues to increase. The number of addresses flagged across the north east to alert staff about where previous violence has occurred has also increased. Following an announcement by the Secretary of State for Health and Care in 2018 to equip ambulance staff with body-worn video cameras, NEAS consulted with ambulance crews and trade unions and decided the organisation would take part in the pilot.
NEAS was the first UK ambulance trust to trial body-worn video cameras. As staff are reporting more incidents of violence and aggression, the organisation wanted to take every precaution possible to ensure that employees were safe whilst at work and were keen on finding ways to reduce the risk of violence towards staff.

Evidence shows that most of these incidents happen away from CCTV-covered areas, such as NEAS vehicles. The introduction of body-worn cameras, designed to help reduce the violence and aggression staff are currently facing, provides vital protection for staff whilst away from their vehicles. In addition to the preventative value, valuable evidence is also captured to support potential action by the police and Crown Prosecution Service.

**What the organisation did**

The trust previously purchased a small number of body-worn video devices to use as a tool for the training of trauma paramedics to review footage of training exercises. Working with Edesix (a provider of body-worn cameras) NEAS was able to secure 54 cameras, plus supporting hardware and software and initial training to run the pilot.

Support from executive directors, staff members, managers and union representatives were crucial to the success of this process. The crews involved in the trial were trained to use the cameras and worked within standard operating procedures and a robust governance framework. The trust updated their existing surveillance camera policy in line with the changes in legislation and the inclusion of body-worn video.

A campaign, which included social media and the local news, was launched to inform and engage with the public. This received positive attention. Following the conclusion of the pilot, NEAS was then able to secure funding for 14 additional devices to continue to provide the cameras for the benefit of staff. NEAS has attended a number of national and regional events to share their work and supported other colleagues with a view to running their own pilots and establishing governance arrangements.

**Results and benefits**

Due to the successful launch, NEAS expanded the pilot. There are now in excess of 100 ambulance staff who have used the devices. The feedback from staff and the general public was exceptionally positive, with an overarching message from crews that they feel safer and that the devices de-escalate situations, deterring violence and aggression.

The number of staff reporting incidents of this nature has decreased. There were 541 reports in 2017/18, 614 in 2018/19 and 291 in 2019/20 year to date (Apr-Sept). Overall, NEAS has made significant improvements to supporting staff in reporting incidents, which is reflected in the staff survey results.

“There is a sense of security when wearing it, knowing that the evidence is there to protect you and prosecute criminals who attack us.”
In addition, NEAS has introduced several improvements to help reduce violence and aggression, body-worn video being the latest development. The evidence indicates that the introduction of body-worn cameras acts as a deterrent and as such, NEAS might have expected the numbers to be higher without this initiative in place.

Through the pilot, NEAS has also built up closer working relationships with the police and other partners to respond to those perpetrators with warning letters and, where necessary, criminal action. Footage has been captured to support staff who have been assaulted as evidence for prosecution, should the employees decide to press charges.

Staff have reported that the cameras make them feel safer and are actively preventing aggression towards them. They have also reported that they feel as though the trust values their personal safety and wellbeing. One staff member said: “There is a sense of security when wearing it, knowing that the evidence is there to protect you and prosecute criminals who attack us.”

**Overcoming obstacles**

Following its success, a business case has been written to support a three-year scheme to ensure body-worn camera use can continue to support frontline staff in challenging situations. Work is ongoing with the NEAS and NHS England to secure funding that was agreed in the NHS Long Term Plan to continue with a national pilot in the use of body-worn video. This pilot needs to be able to evidence that the cameras are cost effective, increase the chances of successful prosecutions and provide staff with reassurances around their safety.

**Takeaway tips**

1. Invest the time in finding the right supplier who can provide full support, advice and training to staff.
2. Trade union and staff member involvement was crucial in the success of the pilot.
3. Investing in staff safety can have a significant impact upon their wellbeing.
4. Ensure boards are supportive and will champion the pilot, so that a clear message is filtered down throughout the organisation.

**Further information**

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