Involving doctors in implementing an online rostering system

Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust made savings valued at £20,000 across a six-month pilot project to implement an online rostering system for junior doctors.

High impact change 1:
Increase understanding of the issue

The goal of the pilot project was to devise a quicker and more efficient method of producing rotas for our junior doctors through assessing current work practices and implementing an online system.

What we did:

After attending a demonstration of the North West Rostering tool, we decided it was something we could really use to our benefit. We had previously been using spreadsheets for rotas but this would make it more transparent, easier to use and better for doctors.

We quickly realised that if we wanted our doctors on board we needed to get them involved as early as possible. So we undertook an initial consultation with a small group of doctors to analyse and develop our internal procedures to accommodate an online rostering system.

It made sense to tag a demonstration of the system onto a meeting the doctors were already attending. We showed them the system and admitted that there will be mistakes but, working together, we would be able to develop a system that suits us all.

We opened up a two-way conversation, giving plenty of opportunities for feedback and making ourselves available for informal feedback and discussions. This helped to inform how we developed and implemented the system.

High impact change 2:
Manage the process and take control

Running an initial pilot of the rostering system, the trust, in conjunction with the medical staff, was looking to improve on the efficiency of the current method for planning rotas, while making significant savings.

What we did:

At the outset a small group was selected to initiate and embed the online rostering programme. This included the trust's medical director to ensure clear and open lines of communication with the medical staff.

To establish a smooth transition, the first month saw us running the new online system alongside the existing paper-based procedure, before gradually phasing this previous practice out.

High impact change 5:
Engage with staff

Looking at the long-term impact that this online system could have, it was vital to involve the medical director and senior medical staff from the outset, to improve buy-in as well as convey the results and any further roll-out clearly to all stakeholders.

Frequent meetings were held with the participating staff and, based on these, minor adjustments were made to improve the system's effectiveness from the junior doctors' and trust's point of view. The feedback was that the online rostering allowed for advanced planning of leave and was seen to be fair and transparent.

Results and next steps

In terms of statistical results, the more efficient rota management allowed the trust to make substantial savings, valued at £20,000 through reducing the use of locums and trimming administration costs.

Based on the success of the pilot scheme, the board has taken the decision to gradually expand the online rostering system across the trust, centralising the function within medical staffing. The results and feedback from the initial trial indicate that it makes the once onerous task of organising rotas easier to manage and produce.