Case Study

Utilising technology and stock management tools to remotely audit nursing homes during the COVID-19 pandemic

John Dicomidis, Pharmacist, Governance team, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

BACKGROUND

John Dicomidis is a Pharmacist who works in the Governance team within the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB).

At present, John's role includes checking that nursing homes are complying with the requirements the board sets, specifically focusing on their medication. His role, until recently, was totally unique and for quite some time, he was the only pharmacist working in care homes. The nature of John's role means he physically visits nursing homes on a regular basis to review their process, how medication is ordered, stored, administered, and disposed of.

John also assists the nursing team if any medication problems occur, or investigations are launched.

Recently John has been getting involved in more than just strictly pharmacy related tasks as, through regular interaction with the nursing team, he has found himself occasionally supporting them when needed.

AIMS

Pre-COVID-19, John's role required him to physically visit care homes to audit their process. However, when the pandemic hit, his role slowed down, and he was forced to re-evaluate his process before re-initiating it. To meet pandemic restrictions, John decided to work remotely and send the care homes audits to fill out and return to him. To ensure accuracy, John requested they provide their MA charts for him to review. John also has access to each care home's electronic master chart, enabling him to double check their responses and feedback accordingly.

With this change in procedure, John has also implemented communication channels with additional parties such as GPs and pharmacies. Should there be discrepancies or questions regarding prescriptions, John notes that the new procedures call for him to send a report to both the additional party and the nursing home to ensure clarity is achieved.

Additionally, John highlights the pilot project he's implemented using stock management platform, My Health Online, in nursing homes. Currently this has been implemented in several of the care homes he audits, and it has been a great success so far.

John also discussed the substantial scope for implementing online ordering systems for tools such as dressings within nursing homes.

CHALLENGES

Given his unique position, one challenge John regularly faces is being overworked. He has over 50 nursing homes under his care, and as the sole pharmacist on these accounts, this can be overwhelming. Due to his ability to work remotely, he is currently assisting immunisation teams in Indonesia, alongside his regular duties, and stresses the need for change in the near future.

Additionally, being on a team of one for so long, John also notes that he regularly feels like he's a lone voice and struggles to facilitate change within his department or gain buy-in for procedures that will make his job easier. However, his team is slowly beginning to grow, and change is on the horizon.

OUTCOMES

One of John's main achievements within his role is the ability to actively provide advice and assistance to nursing homes via email.

Whereas previously he would go into the homes, they can now reach him via email when they need to, allowing him to provide that extra level of support and confidence they need.

Additionally, John's work resulted in a wider adoption as he has also been advising the other Health Boards in Wales remotely and assisting Swansea in implementing My Health Online to their programmes.

NEXT STEPS

Looking to the future, John notes the need to ensure that adequate time and resources are allocated to enable innovation and facilitate innovative ideas long-term. Although it is now online, the audit he regularly provides to each nursing home consists of circa 200 questions and while it is only administered once a year, there is a significant resource implication in auditing a large number of nursing homes.

Additionally, John stresses that for innovation to be encouraged, one needs "thinking time" to come up with and promote an idea, as well as sufficient capacity to put said idea into play and to facilitate its development. This is currently very difficult to achieve and as such there is a risk that good ideas may fail to be exploited as they may not be conveyed to the right channels, which may result in demotivation and discouragement.

"[With COVID-19 restrictions in place] I can't go into the nursing homes and check stock. I could, but I don't think it's ethical at the moment to introduce somebody new. . . . I'm quite good at seeing a problem and thinking I've seen something over there that might help – enter My Health Online. We knew about My Health Online a little bit and I thought, I wonder if this could help the nursing homes. So, we tried it in one home, and it was a big success."

John Dicomidis