

Key improvements following InfoFlex implementation

Quality

- Bespoke web portal addresses specific needs
- Easy configurability combined with a more manageable user interface
- Designed for tablets to improve staff interaction
- Concurrent improvement in patient care

Efficiency

- Improves accessibility of information for on- and off-site staff
- Addresses connectivity and portability issues while retaining flexibility of main InfoFlex system
- Speeds up processes

Ease of use

- Greater flexibility for community and ward staff
- Eliminates need for trolley to transport laptops
- Builds on existing familiarity with InfoFlex software

Hospice Web Portal

InfoFlex develop a web portal in conjunction with St Christopher's Hospice in Sydenham and Pilgrims hospices in East Kent to solve issues involving remote data entry and portability.

Issues addressed

InfoFlex software was installed at St Christopher's Hospice as their electronic patient record (EPR) system in May 2007. St Christopher's provides palliative care services to over 2,500 patients across five boroughs in south London; in Bromley, Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark. It has a team of over 50 clinical nurse specialists and other health care professionals working in the community and a total of 150 InfoFlex users.

Pilgrims hospices care for 2,500 patients across three sites in Canterbury, Thanet and Ashford. They have been using InfoFlex for six years and currently have a team of 200 users including nurses, doctors, healthcare assistants (HCAs), counsellors, therapists and fundraising staff.

Staff at both Pilgrims and St Christopher's accessed their EPR on laptops in the case of both inpatient and community care, either used communally within a ward or taken to patients' homes where InfoFlex was accessed through a Virtual Private Network (VPN).

One of the key objectives of the initial implementation of InfoFlex was to improve accessibility of information for both on- and off-site staff. Whilst the main InfoFlex system, when connected to the network, allowed the user to input data in real time, it did not facilitate remote access. Both Pilgrims and St Christopher's sought a solution to this problem, particularly with regard to their community staff who regularly travelled to locations outside of the network.

Both organisations cited portability and connectivity issues. The weight and bulkiness of laptops made them a nuisance to carry around for nurses in the community or to wheel around on a trolley in the ward. Reception issues resulted in nurses reverting to paper notes if their laptops were slow to connect or were otherwise unable to access InfoFlex through the network.

Design and implementation

Both Pilgrims and St Christopher's initially chose InfoFlex because the product offers a template on which it is possible to design, build and

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mold a system that meets their specific needs. InfoFlex also allows for continuous in-house modification and is easily adaptable to evolving working practices.

The InfoFlex Web Portal addresses the connectivity and portability issues previously cited whilst allowing organisations to retain the flexibility of the InfoFlex main system. Pilgrims and St Christopher's have worked together to design a refined version of the main InfoFlex system that includes only the relevant functions required to meet their needs and can be configured to include the appropriate information for a particular user. For example, Pilgrims' fundraising staff can access the Web Portal to retrieve a patient's name, their next of kin and contact details, but not their medications or treatment information.

The elimination of irrelevant functions with regard to specific users speeds up processes and makes using InfoFlex even more convenient for all staff. Aesthetically the Web Portal looks and feels modern, using tabs to allow for easy scrolling and swiping between multiple screens and records.

Results and benefits

The Web Portal allows InfoFlex to be accessed with iPads or other tablet devices, providing greater flexibility for community and ward staff. Particularly in the community, the benefits of a tablet include portability and immediate access to InfoFlex via 4G. Tablet devices can also be used in the ward, eliminating the need for a trolley on which to transport heavy laptops.

Both Pilgrims and St Christopher's believe that tablets improve the quality of patient care, allowing staff to sit alongside a patient during a consultation rather than opposite them, obstructed by a laptop screen. In this sense, time efficiency itself may not improve but each patient receives more direct attention during consultations, improving relationships between staff members and patients and ultimately elevating the quality of care available.

Looking ahead

Reg Van Selm, IT director at St Christopher's Hospice:

"InfoFlex is a framework; you build it. We built the design from scratch initially so we've built it around what our needs are, and obviously the ability to be able to tweak it is quite handy. For example, we've just done a new design which we've been able to build using buttons rather than drop-downs – the sequence is really nice and quick, and that lends itself to being able to use a tablet. The biggest benefit will be the combination of 4G plus a tablet so we've got really fast and instantaneous access to notes that our staff working in the community need rapidly."

Colin James, IT director at Pilgrims hospices:

"Technology, as well as the public's expectations and demands in health-associated care, have evolved. We're therefore looking at

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extending, as far as community staff are concerned, the aspect of the laptop, which is a bit clunky and unwieldy, to be able to use iPads, which are more convenient, flexible and user-friendly. Now we can have [a tablet device], sit beside a patient and work through an assessment with them, rather than on a laptop which is more formal."

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