

# STRAND I TECHNOLOGY

## Case study – The background

**Cheshire and Wirral NHS Trust** employs 2,700 staff and provides a comprehensive range of hospital and community based services across more than 70 sites.

Since April 2004, the Trust has been working on a project to modernise its healthcare information systems and vigorously meet the challenges of the NHS National Programme.

It selected the leading CareNotes electronic patient care system following a four-way tender process, and the system is now well established with plans to include more of the Trust's specialist services including:

- Adult and older people's services
- Drug and Alcohol
- Psychology

The overall aim of the project was to achieve highly efficient access to patient records – allowing clinicians to see up-to-the-minute patient information from any location in the Trust at any time of night or day.

## The challenges

Cheshire and Wirral NHS Trust covers a 60 mile radius treating patients in adult and older people's mental health services, as well as CAMHs, forensic mental health services and Prison In-Reach at Styal Prison.

The Trust's mental health services are comprehensive and its work involves close co-operation with social services, six primary care trusts, as well as other NHS organisations, statutory and voluntary agencies.

Before CareNotes was set up, the Trust's healthcare IT systems were like a 'patchwork quilt' across the Trust with no centralised control over patient records.

The old system did not aid clinicians in their workload – with no immediate access to complete patient records.

Paul Halliday, IT Manager at Cheshire and Wirral NHS Trust, said: "It was widely acknowledged that improving the patient record system would improve care for our patients."

## Developing the IT system

After considering several IT system providers, the Trust chose to work with Strand Technology – the UK's leading software provider for the specialist mental health sector of the NHS.

Strand Technology's CareNotes electronic patient care system already has a proven track record of coping with the complex care associated with the mental health sector – which often involves a wide range of professionals, from psychiatrists and psychologists to social services and teachers.

A team of software experts from Strand Technology were able to tailor CareNotes to create an electronic version of the hospital's own systems – reducing pen and paper tasks and creating a centralised information hub.

## Implementation

CareNotes was introduced in 2004 with a roll out programme allowing for the initial training of 900 staff.

Training was carried out at the Trust's key sites, as well as using a 'Training Pod' which included a bank of computers for staff to use.

This was run alongside a controlled introduction of the CareNotes system across the Trust.

During this time refinements were worked into the system to ensure clinical staff gained maximum benefits from the change.

The initial phase was completed within the controlled timescale set by the hospital's IT project team, headed by IT manager Paul Halliday.

With over 900 people to train on the system, there were a full range of attitudes towards such a major change in working practice – including apprehension, excitement and even a little 'technofear'.

Comprehensive training was therefore a major priority and the system was created to include a wide range of 'user-friendly' benefits... such as standardised forms automatically generating a patient's basic details, to save on duplication, and a bank of standard assessment tools.

A dedicated helpline, manned by Strand Technology IT experts, was also set up to build confidence among staff and ease them through the transition.

CareNotes was developed to become an electronic version of the hospital's own care procedures – mirroring pen and paper tasks and therefore giving staff a clear concept of what was being achieved.

## Changes and benefits

The CareNotes system has dramatically changed the way clinicians work within Cheshire and Wirral – with information on individual patients available at their fingertips.

Patient care within the mental health service is complex and, because of its multi-disciplinary focus, can generate large volumes of clinical information.

CareNotes can hold all this information – allowing clinicians to access the patient's entire clinical history at the touch of a button.

This is particularly useful where a range of professionals are all working towards a patient's care – including psychiatrists, behavioural nurses and vocational staff.

These different strands all have a contribution to make to the care process, and the CareNotes electronic system allows all this information to be harnessed 'in one place' to give a clear picture of an individual patient.

As well as clinical benefits, this 'information revolution' has helped save time on generating reports.

Paperwork, correspondences and reports required when new legislation and guidelines come in can also be added into the system without fuss.

Paul Halliday added: "This is a first for the Trust – to see its community data available from one central source.

"It allows us to manage the data more easily and there are benefits on producing reports.

"Client-based solutions have to be installed and maintained, whereas web-based systems, such as CareNotes are better – mobile technologies are the best way forward."

## Future

Using the CareNotes software has unlocked huge benefits to Cheshire and Wirral, bringing new possibilities for delivering care.

The Trust has been forward-thinking in its approach to electronic patient care systems and has decided not to 'stand still' while waiting for the National Programme to focus on mental health services.

Instead it has opted for an interim solution and five-year support agreement with the potential to be part of the National Programme in the future.

This has allowed it to reap the rewards of early implementation of the national NPfIT agenda, achieving targets for data and information standards.

Paul Halliday, Head of IT at Cheshire and Wirral, said: "We feel we are ahead of the game and other organisations and Trusts are now looking at our systems.

"As a Trust, we couldn't wait for a National Programme solution to come along some time in the future, particularly as we believe the information and patient record system is vital in our preparations to become a Foundation.

"Changing to CareNotes has been a massive undertaking – the IT infrastructure at the Trust had to be developed with network links and computers at all our sites.

"We have taken the view that an interim solution is the only solution we can follow – the National Programme timescales are a long way in the future and, if we don't jump to a solution now, we will still be talking about it in three years' time and not be in such good shape.

"In effect, we have implemented our very own mini NPfIT information and communication system – without a big risk. We can access full patient information 24/7, and have a centralised system for records and information management.

"The only difference is we have done it and it is working effectively and many others have not."

The CareNotes system is extremely advanced and underlines the importance of a specialist electronic patient care system for the mental health sector – rather than a 'one size fits all' approach.

In the future Cheshire and Wirral plans to expand the use of its CareNotes system to the wider care community. This will take the Trust to 1,600 users across services such as Adult and Older People, Drug and Alcohol, Learning Disabilities and Psychology.

Harnessing this complex technology will revolutionise the way NHS staff work and offer new and exciting ways to deliver care in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

For more details visit [www.strandtechnology.co.uk](http://www.strandtechnology.co.uk) or ring 0845 66 079 67.

**Ends**

**Note:**

**Strand Technology is a leading I.T. software provider based in Warrington.  
For more details visit [www.strandtechnology.co.uk](http://www.strandtechnology.co.uk)**