



COMMISSIONING | **data management**

# Knowledge is power

Rapid access to information is key to successful GP-led commissioning. *Practice Business* looks at what a practice needs

Primary care is under pressure to deliver cost savings as GPs take the commissioning reins. Investing in good IT seems like the last priority on any practice manager's budgetary to-do list; however well-organised data can save a surgery money.

Primary care organisations are being encouraged to cut back administrative costs, including back-office staff, which could mean thousands of staff being made redundant. Saving money now could save jobs later.

**INSTANT REWARDS**

However, balancing patient welfare with financial responsibility can be difficult. "With a government emphasising the realisation of back office efficiency to minimise the impact on front line service delivery... NHS organisations need to look at ways of improving patient throughput without jeopardising patient care," agrees Bob Marsh, director at healthcare technology specialist, Jayex.

Receptionists are often better trained, so why not use them better? Marsh points out that during surgeries, "their time is almost totally taken up by the mundane process of manually checking patient lists – or answering repeated questions about the length of wait". A system that automatically checks in patients is one way of reducing wasted staff time.

**BACK OFFICE WOES**

It's not only the back office staff that could be better used, but the technology too. Under GP-led commissioning, consortia will be required to make informed decisions on budgetary spend, with fewer resources. This will only be possible with accurate, easy-to-access data in the shape of a working back office system.

"Access to high-quality, timely data is essential for GP commissioning – you can't devise new or more efficient services without understanding how

your existing service is being used," advises EMIS chief executive Sean Riddell. "This means that GP consortia's IT systems will need to join up historically separate datasets and processes to enable more real-time benchmarking, predictive modelling, service level management as well as the redesign of care pathways."

Interoperability, or working together, is a vital requirement for any NHS IT system, according to Riddell, especially in light of the government's commitment to synergising primary and secondary care. "Interoperable systems enable other clinical teams to streamline paper flows, replace paper with electronic referral and discharge messaging, and to view and contribute real time data to the patient's 'cradle to grave' electronic patient record," he adds. "Through secure data sharing agreements, they also enable secondary care clinicians to view the patient's GP record including medication regimes and existing medical history."

A good back office system will allow GPs and practices to do what they do best – treat patients. It will also allow consortia to understand the needs of their patients, and commission accordingly. "Freeing up information so that service commissioners can see the big picture is essential," explains Riddell. He uses an example of one practice in Newham, East London that has used an IT system to identify patients who have accessed A&E more than a set number of times a year, allowing it to identify 'frequent fliers', and educate patients about appropriate use of NHS services. This is spot on for a future of accountability in primary care.

**SHARING AROUND**

Rapid, online access to up-to-date and accurate data on who is doing what within other consortia is also critical in the sharing of best practice as this new system evolves, according to David Round of Cegedim Relationship Management.

"Armed with fresh data on the moving landscape that is GP commissioning at present, these groups can share pertinent information in a timely fashion," Round comments. "Consortia need a medium over which to share a proven approach across the board." |

*Freeing up information so that commissioners can see the big picture is essential*