Bitesize Case Study: Advancing Professional Education Through Health Information Systems (APE-THIS)

HEE Quality Standards met:

3 - Supporting and Empowering Learners
5 - Developing and Implementing Curricula and Assessments
6 - Developing a Sustainable Workforce

What was the issue or problem? What did you set out to do?

Health care is an information-intensive environment and health professionals increasingly rely on the support of health information systems (HIS), not least in driving forward the quality and safety agendas. However, there is significant nationwide shortcoming in the education of future health professionals. Existing education programmes do not prepare students in any way for the practical use and exploitation of these systems.

The overall aim of the Advancing Professional Education Through Health Information Systems (APE-THIS) project was to provide the infrastructure required to facilitate enhanced understanding for nursing, and other healthcare students, of health information systems and the value of health information, thereby ensuring that graduating students hold essential informatics competencies prior to taking up healthcare posts. This would be achieved through connectivity from specified university computers to a dedicated mirror of the Allscripts training platform at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust. Eventually students from a range of disciplines will use the platform to become accustomed to electronic record systems before they go out to placement.

More importantly the use of the system will prepare students for practice, giving them a greater understanding of the importance and power of health information. The vision is to embed the training platform in simulated learning activities in which students will use the platform both to inform their engagement with different scenarios, but also to record their practice.

What did you do? What was the intervention or initiative?

The project began in 2015 and the mirror platform became operational within the university in 2017. A dedicated and encrypted network was established to ensure compliance with Information Governance requirements (a site-to-site virtual private network (VPN) using Internet Protocol Security (IPsec and pre-shared key) to share information safely by creating a secure private network available across different locations. A team was established with a dedicated project manager to drive the project through to completion.

What were the Key Outcomes?

•   Bringing the trust into the university thus better aligning education and clinical practice

•   Providing a simple and replicable model for easy implementation across the system

•   Increased exposure to HIS within educational programmes

The platform will be evaluated in terms of enhancement of skills, attitudes, capabilities and preparedness for future health professionals.

What were the lessons learned?

•   Even though the project was relatively short-term, changes in personnel both at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust (SRFT) and the university hampered progress. By its nature, the project has required a degree of volunteerism and in retrospect dedicated resources for staff time might have helped establish a stable project team ensuring continuity.

•   The platform continues to be susceptible to fall out from routine maintenance of connected systems such as the replacement of hardware and updates on the training platform. To mitigate the risks of unexpected downtime, individuals both within the university and at SRFT have been identified as dedicated points of contact. Additional routine technical support for the platform is also available via the information services team at both organisations.

•   Originally the intention had been to integrate the platform in an existing pre-registration Masters level nursing programme. However, this was not possible due to the integration of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. It was agreed going forward that the most appropriate 'place' for the platform is as part of simulated learning activities to reach a maximum number of students. A dedicated PC was also installed on the nurses' station in the School's simulation suite.

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