

Andrew Fearn

Getting the most out of PACS at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust

Andrew Fearn is Director of Health Informatics at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, and took on the role of Project Executive for the trust's implementation of its Picture Archiving and Communications System (PACS). In June 2006 the trust was the first organisation to implement PACS within the Eastern region as part of the National Programme for IT (NPfIT). Andrew says his trust has already made savings of over £1million and is delivering faster and more efficient care for patients.

“Since going live with PACS, the patient pathway has improved because patients can now be seen more quickly, diagnosed more effectively and treated sooner.”

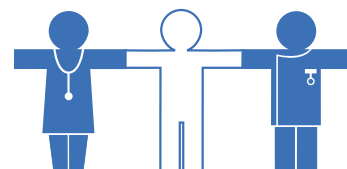
Preparing the business case for PACS

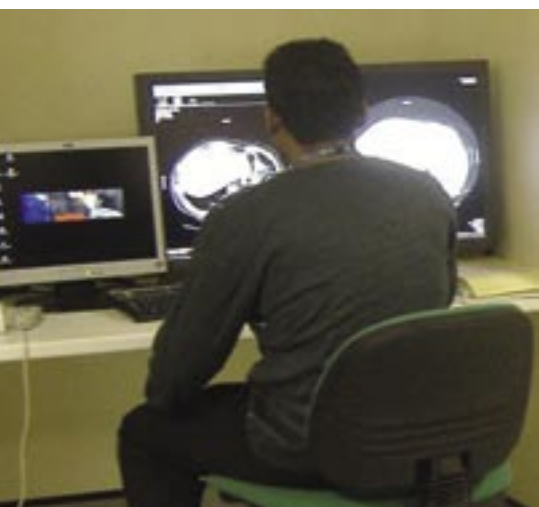
“One of the first challenges the trust faced was preparing the business case and then seeking approval from the trust board to purchase PACS. We didn't have PACS prior to NPfIT and for a number of years our radiologists had been trying to persuade the trust to implement the system.

“With the business case, we set out by firstly identifying the benefits that PACS would bring to the trust, placing a major focus on improved patient safety as well as providing evidence of how poor our current system was.”

For example, before PACS:

- wet film processing was costing the trust over £1million per year;
- 80% of inpatient films were not reported;
- 40% of out-of-hours inpatient films were not viewed;
- most 'normal' A&E films were not reported;
- many films were reported long after they were deemed clinically relevant;
- many films were lost which would call for re-imaging;
- doctors and clerks spent hours every day chasing X-rays; and
- non-reported inpatient x-rays missed 35% of significant abnormalities.





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“Dr John Somers, Clinical Director of the trust’s Clinical Support Division, presented the trust board with examples of how the implementation of PACS could eradicate the above to improve patient safety and provide a more efficient service. The project was soon given the go ahead and work with Accenture, our local service provider, and Agfa, the PACS supplier, began.

“As with any IT change programme of this scale, the introduction of PACS brought about massive changes in day-to-day working practices. But we found that the benefits gained since going live with PACS have been huge and those previously unsupportive of the system are now coming round to the new way of doing things. So, clinical engagement is absolutely essential.”

Benefits realisation

Andrew says he is pleased that clinicians have found their ways of working have changed considerably for the better. He says: “The key benefits identified in our original business case have been realised much quicker than expected. It was predicted that with PACS we could make the trust 40% film-less in one year but we became 80% film-less in just two weeks!”

That’s not all – the trust realised additional benefits including:

- A continual reduction in the average turnaround time for reports from 80 hours pre-PACS to 38 hours post PACS.
- 68% of films are now verified within 48hrs, compared to 27% previously.
- Financial savings of up to £1million due to a combination of massively reduced film processing costs and minimal requirements for admin and clerical staff.

The trust is also seeing a number of improvements in the care and safety of its patients. Andrew says: “Since going live with PACS, the patient pathway has improved because patients can now be seen more quickly, diagnosed more effectively and treated sooner.

“From the very start, the trust’s big focus was to improve patient safety and provide a far more efficient service.

“With the introduction of PACS, we have met and exceeded all our expectations and gained the benefits much sooner than expected. PACS made a huge difference. This really has proved to be an exemplary project!”

For more information about PACS, visit: www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/pacs

