

NELFT partners with The Access Group on virtual wards pilot to integrate care services

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North East London NHS Foundation Trust (NELFT) has partnered with The Access Group to implement an integrated virtual wards system, using Access solutions.

NELFT and Access will together design and deliver the integrated care platform in what is a proof-of-concept pilot. This first-of-type care model is designed to streamline patient flow, support virtual wards, and handle patient discharge from hospital to home. The solution will help the trust meet the NHS England Delivery plan for recovering urgent and emergency services.

This project will lead the way to join up care across primary and secondary healthcare, social care, and the care sector within the region.

Hospital overcrowding is a big problem, and teamed with the added challenges winter brings, the healthcare sector faces more upcoming pressures. The Covid pandemic has left a backlog of patients, with A&E departments overcrowded, and delayed patient discharge. With 19 out of 20 beds occupied, and nearly 14,000 patients remaining in hospital longer than necessary in the past year, bed capacity and management is a huge problem.

Discharge delays commonly occur due to problems with provisioning care and equipment. The commissioning process remains a manual effort in many trusts, relying on phone calls and emails to providers to find the most suitable care packages to move people out of hospital. This is using vital clinical time to carry out a task which can be automated.

The [NHS Delivery Plan has set out targets](#) for Trusts in a bid to tackle this, with a minimum of 76% of patients admitted, transferred, or discharged within four hours by March 2024, with further improvements going into 2025. NELFT has been looking to optimise existing services to resolve the backlog and overcrowding, aiming to reduce the burden and workload on their healthcare professionals, while continuing to deliver high quality care to patients.

By digitising the patient flow and discharge process, clinicians will have a real-time view of bed availability and have simplified forms to speed up patient referral, transfer and discharge services. This digitised process is underpinned by a commissioning solution which evaluates care providers at the touch of a button, allowing processes to be streamlined and efficiencies to be made. This solution within the hospital is teamed with remote patient support devices within the persons home, which feedback vital statistics on a individuals wellbeing, 24/7, directly into their health record; allowing a more proactive approach to care while the individual is still in the comfort of their own home.

Umesh Gadhvi, Chief Digital Information Officer at NELFT commented, “Virtual wards are increasingly being used by the NHS to provide care to patients where they live, whether in a care setting or at home. Our digital front door can help keep people out of hospital, discharge patients early, reduce clinical time and give patients autonomy and choice.

The Trust has developed an ambitious digital strategy which has been designed with our patients and [virtual wards digital pathway](#) supports enables patient choice of care. Our design allows patients to use digital options to access and receive their healthcare. [Virtual wards](#) is key digital offering to (also known as hospital at home) allow patients to get the care they need at home safely and conveniently, rather than being in hospital therefore supporting hospital avoidance.”

NELFT have been working with The Access Group for over 10 years so we’re really excited to partner with them on this new project, helping us to join up our acute and community health and social care. The solution will provide real-time data across the system whilst utilising several Access products already integrated within the Trust. This means user familiarity, existing system knowledge, and simpler deployment. The solution will be rolled out between NELFT, Barking Havering and Redbridge University Hospital Trust (BHRUT), and The London Borough of Waltham Forest. All three organisations will receive streamlined services and have access to information at the point of care.

Steve Wightman, Healthcare Director at Access HSC (Health Support and Care), said: “We are delighted to be working with NELFT to deliver virtual wards across the region. Virtual wards are an exciting opportunity across health and care that sees pressure taken off hospitals by freeing up bed space, and stress taken away from patients by returning them to familiar, comfortable surroundings. With our new platforms we can support this transition from hospital to home, allowing a greater capacity for care in North East London.”