Conference Abstract

Digital technologies and rural healthcare: the Cumbria Rural Health Forum

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Abstract

Introduction: Rural communities face particular issues in accessing healthcare. These issues include:

• Dispersed communities meaning that people have to travel further to access healthcare;

• A lack of connectivity and the absence of physical networks that enable the easy exchange of knowledge, ideas and best-practice;

• Smaller GP practices, health centres and related specialist support services, so that staff may feel professionally isolated;

• Restrictions on capacity due to problems with the recruitment and retention of professionals;

• A greater reliance on volunteer services;

• Population demographics that include relatively more older people than in urban centres.

Cumbria is a rural, it represents 50% of the land mass of the North West yet has less than 7% of the population. The county has some dispersed urban centres with varying levels of connectivity, but these are significant distances from each other and face the same issues of isolation and access to services as the rest of the county. The Cumbria Rural Health Forum was formed in September 2013 by a consortium of over 30 organisations interested in and responsible for the delivery of public health, health and social care in Cumbria, to provide leadership in developing common themes around rurality and to work strategically to improve the quality of services for rural communities in Cumbria.

The Forum is developing the Cumbria Strategy for Digital Technologies in Health and Social Care, which is the subject of this paper. The approach is believed to be unique, focusing on patient outcomes, professional skill needs and with sponsorship from organisations from the public, private and voluntary sector. Similar strategies, for example in Scotland , have tended to be government led and focused on centralised service infrastructure. Our approach will build on identified demand and aspirations, to develop a dynamic roadmap that can be implemented locally by those who shape it, considering models such as Asset Based Community Development

Aims and objectives: The aim is to support an integrated approach to adoption of digital technologies to address rural health issues, through sharing of best practice and a systematic approach to demand identification.

Specific objectives are:

O1. Identify opportunities for use of digital technologies through development of new methdologies;

O2. Map existing practice within Cumbria and transferable best practice from elsewhere;

O3. Gain understanding of relevance to generic rural health issues;

O4. Develop a roadmap for implementation within Cumbria.

Results: We will present results of the analysis and scoping activity to identify opportunities for implementation of digital solutions, together with early implementation projects, forming the first stages of the Cumbria Digital Health Roadmap.

Conclusion: The specific issues facing rural communities in accessing/using health and social care mean that digital technologies offer a more significant opportunity than in urban areas. A strategic approach that engages and is led by local stakeholders can develop learning in how to adopt and introduce change at scale.

Keywords

rurality; integrated care

PowerPoint presentation:

https://www.conftool.pro/digital-health-care-2014/index.php?page=adminPapersDetails&path=adminPapers&form_id=63

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