

Effective Departmental Quality Checking – Is your Finance Department the answer?

Our MD, James Wilson, outlines ways the finance department's policies can be implemented in a clinical environment.



Quality checks, performance reviews & scrutinised report writing is something that's second nature to most employees in finance departments across the country. Within the NHS we have long been used to it. What you may be surprised to hear (or not), is there's a large amount of research weaving its way from the U.S stipulating that finance departments, within hospitals, should be commended and

emulated by other departments.

When looking at what can be done to improve the quality-implementation challenges facing the NHS in 2016 one of the primary concerns should be employing the best, most effective ways to roll out new procedures and plans, relating to both quality and care.

Consider the NHS organisation you work for and reflect on these questions. Which department has the best track record in meeting targets? Which department is honest and efficient with their goal setting? Looking to the leaders of departments, which team does the best at holding the management accountable? Which department has the most influence in the whole organisation? Finally, look back on previous quality control implementations and think about the department that most successfully absorbed new processes and policies into its daily work routine.

If you find yourself answering 'The Finance Department' to these questions, you're probably not alone. Detailed research from the US has revealed that when leaders in quality and safety programmes within hospitals tested the productivity and success rates when emulating the finance department's hard wired processes and tactics, the results were astonishing and showed massive rates of success.

Aspects of successful finance departments which we all recognise include: management accountability (for quality performance) and managing with data. By applying strategies such as these, the test studies showed huge improvements in execution, and removing barriers to implementation of new, important strategies. These improvements were not just incremental, but statistically substantial shifts in performance.

Take a look at the Finance Departments rule book:

- **Recording of financial performance** – any department within a health care organisation should be able to report on quality or safety performance to the standard to which the Finance Department is expected to. As the Finance Department is expected to report on the accounts of every department in the organisation, clinical leaders should report on the quality aspect of *every* service line. For example, using something that is typical in a cost-accounting system such as medication records will indicate whether your clinical colleagues are using evidence-based medicine, and the complication rates should indicate the amount of optimal care given to their patients.
- **Partnering** – don't allow clinicians to try and perform or guess calculations. Unless they're trained in finance, frankly, nobody should give credit to their numbers. Partner up with a clinical colleague. This may sound ambitious at first, but creating a model that can calculate the savings generated by the quality reform, in addition gaining support from your financial colleagues, including management at CFO/DoF level, will go along way to building confidence in the initiative's savings.
- **Equate your chief quality officer to your CFO/DoF** – Imagine a finance department without a DoF – an unlikely and daunting proposition. Logically, if we expect a certain level of management to take care of our financial services, the equivalent accountability should be applied to a member of management who looks after safety, performance improvement, patient satisfaction and so on. Each sector requires a certain level of expertise and supervision.

The methods that you use, as finance professionals, are exactly the techniques and insights your clinical colleagues can learn from when attempting to implement a highly effective quality programme. Offering to join forces and open up a productive dialogue between two teams can create a great basis for shared knowledge.

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