

HSS Communicator:

St Helens & Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

The Radiology Department at St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust implemented HSS Communicator, to help improve communications between the department, hospital wards and GPs and to support the requirements of national safety standards.

Introduction

The Radiology Department at St Helens and Knowsley NHS Trust previously utilised a fax and paper based tracking system to support the delivery and receipt of time critical radiology results. The administration of the process was very labour intensive and the system was not auditable, leaving room for error without recourse. Out-of-hours, it was difficult to guarantee that urgent results had been received and acted upon. Historically, cases had been highlighted where the coded Radiology report had not been actioned, possibly bearing a direct impact on care and patient outcomes.

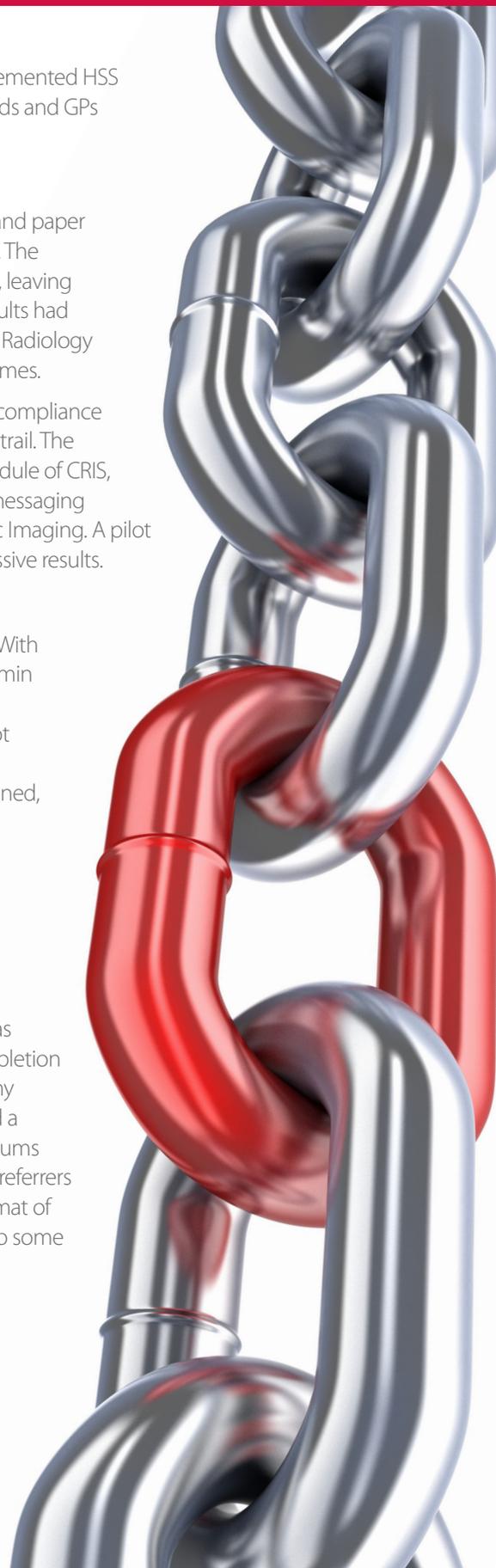
It was determined that an electronic solution would help speed up the process, improve compliance with NPSA requirements and improve governance processes, by providing a robust audit trail. The radiology department selected HSS Communicator, on the basis it is a fully integrated module of CRIS, which they had been using for over 20 years. The solution is based on industry standard messaging which allows it to be configured to work with other hospital systems, as well as Diagnostic Imaging. A pilot was launched which was so successful that it was deployed more widely with very impressive results.

The situation

Denise Twist, Radiology Governance Lead at St Helens and Knowsley NHS Trust explains: "With 700 alert codes being created every month, the old manual system was taking various admin staff around 3 hours every day to maintain. After 5pm on weekdays and at weekends, radiologists were expected to alert the ward about patients with critical findings. It was not always possible to speak to someone on the ward, which posed a real problem to patient safety. Cases had been highlighted where the coded radiology report had not been actioned, potentially impacting on the care and treatment of the patient. "With the introduction of the new NPSA safer practice note 16, [which ensures that radiology imaging results are communicated and promptly addressed] it meant we had to be sure that the reports had been acted on."

Easy to use, impressive results

Supported by HSS development staff, the St Helens and Knowsley radiology department established a pilot user group of GPs and Consultants. A copy of the coded alert report was dispatched by secure e-mail to each referrer at a pre-determined time, following the completion of a daily statistical report, using the scheduler facility of HSS CRIS. This report 'picked up' any alert codes put into the imaging report by the radiologist and the Department developed a STAT report to ensure all modified results were included so any report changes or addendums were not missed. During the trial, the use of the manual system was maintained for these referrers as a means of comparison and as a safety net. The pilot also gave time to consider the format of the email and what needed to be included. It was decided to include the full report due to some GP practices not having access to the CRIS system.



Communicator enables multiple transfer options which gives further flexibility of copying results to other teams for example the 'lung shadow' team, as well as the option of sending normal and abnormal results at referrer level. At the end of the trial, 100% of users indicated that the system was more secure and reliable and wanted to continue using it. The task of providing the service to all referrers started and there are now over 700 referrers using the programme.

"We consulted with GPs and set up a 'group distribution email list' which included each practice in preference to using 'generic' email accounts, for security reasons," explains Denise. "After discussion with each practice manager, we were given a list of staff that they would like to be members of their distribution list, to receive the alert email. Likewise, we consulted each group of referrers in the hospital, e.g. 'Burns and Plastics' and 'Orthopaedics' and created corresponding distribution lists for them with the medical secretaries as members. Since all staff in the group email receive the alert, this prevents 'missed alerts' due to holiday and sick leave."

Denise explains: "We find that Communicator is excellent and very easy to use. It didn't take long to set up, even though it was unknown territory for us. The system works by sending an email to the referral team. Once the email has been acted on, the referral team reply. This is fed back to Communicator and the system updates i.e. the acknowledgement date appears against the event details."

With Communicator now installed, emails are sent out automatically to GPs and consultants, and if they don't respond after 7 days, the email will automatically resend, the same after 14 days. This has now been so successful the team have reduced the 'reminder email' to 5 days and then clerical intervention to 5 days after that.

HSS Communicator Benefits

The introduction HSS Communicator has enabled a significant improvement in patient safety. The new system - which is fully integrated with the trust's radiology system, CRIS - improves reliability and accuracy, and crucially speeds up communication between Radiology and other departments, thus enabling more rapid and effective communication with referrers. This ensures patients with 'critical findings' can be seen more quickly therefore enhancing the probability of a positive outcome. A comprehensive audit trail of messages sent and acknowledgements received provides added assurance.

Denise explains: "If a patient has something seriously wrong with them the report can be with the referrer within minutes of being verified. We have impressive evidence to demonstrate the speed of the solution. A patient was seen last month at 15:33, had an ultrasound and the report received 20 minutes later. Incredible!"

"The other major benefit and timesaver is that because we are using an electronic system, we have a reply that acknowledges the report and therefore we know that the recipient is acting on it. It has also helped with our safeguarding children policy. We have included in the statistical report that if a patient under 16 years of age has an alert coded report, a copy of the email will go to the Safeguarding team for them to check."

Denise says "I would definitely highly recommend Communicator to other hospitals - I am delighted with the way it has improved both process and patient safety. We believe we now have a more robust, safer method of ensuring that these reports are delivered and acted upon in a timely manner. The added bonus is a reduction in the associated clerical effort from 3 hours per day to run the system, to a follow up of up to 2 reports per day which takes minutes. Accurate audit process is now achievable and is included in performance data provided to the Executive Board as part of the governance assurance process. Since starting the pilot, we now use a direct HL7 feed, which means as soon as an urgent report is verified, the email goes out to the referrer where as previously this went out just once a day."

What Next...

"In the future, we hope to implement an 'Out of Hours' process," concludes Denise.

"Radiologists will be able to tick a box to say a report is critical. A copy of the email and report will then go to a generic email address which will be accessed by clinical staff and non medical staff such as bed managers and matrons - this means that staff can log in to check on their patients."

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