

NHS Lambeth finds new ways to encourage patients to attend the NHS Health Check

Overview

NHS Lambeth was excited by the potential to reach out into their community with the NHS Health Check, but they knew they would have to work hard to encourage attendance. They turned to Axis-Shield for help. As a leading provider of point of care technology, Axis-Shield facilitates effective, easy-to-administer testing that generates results quickly in both near patient care and point of care settings. Using Axis-Shield's Afinion™ analysers, NHS Lambeth began to assess the feasibility and effectiveness of point of care diagnostic tests as a way to enhance delivery of the NHS Health Check.

About NHS Lambeth

NHS Lambeth oversees the healthcare needs of circa 345,000 patients right across the London borough of Lambeth. Their role is intensely proactive: from providing exceptional front line services to promoting healthy lifestyle initiatives, they encourage better health for all.

With a budget of over £600 million, they meet patients' needs for a wide range of services, including primary care (GPs, dentists and opticians), hospitals and mental health services, community teams (providing nursing and therapy services), NHS trusts and foundation trusts.

A new approach

Catherine Kironde is Head of Health Delivery for Lambeth Community Health (part of NHS Lambeth); as well as the many benefits of the NHS Health Check scheme, she could see some potential stumbling blocks. In particular, she was concerned that so many of the intended beneficiaries were unlikely to attend.

"In this area only 45% of the population is indigenous and the rest are from a variety of different ethnic groups. Many of these groups don't access healthcare. Even across the indigenous population, a lot of people are paid hourly, which means they will lose money if they take time off to attend a health check appointment."

Catherine Kironde, Head of Health Delivery for Lambeth Community Health

Previous experience has also shown that many of the groups on NHS Lambeth's high-risk list for vascular problems would be unwilling to have a health check when they didn't feel ill to begin with. So, Catherine and her team had to devise a number of ways to encourage attendance.

With patients' time at a premium they knew that completing more tests in a shorter space of time would make the appointment appear more worthwhile. No follow-up appointments; no need for separate results consultations – everything could be done in one go.

For those patients who decided not to make the trip – even in spite of the potential benefits – NHS Lambeth came up with another approach. Having heard about Afinion™ analysers from colleagues at two of the borough's biggest hospitals, Kings College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Catherine could see that portable testing apparatus would change everything. Instead of waiting for patients to come to them; they could take the testing to the patients.



Working with Axis Shield

NHS Lambeth set up a trial specifically to assess the feasibility of using POC diagnostic tests (lipids and HbA1c) to implement their screening programme. They decided to pilot the scheme in 5 of the organisation's 52 practices, and looked to assess the responses of staff and patients to gauge its effectiveness. The other practices would continue to conduct vascular testing and send the blood samples for laboratory analysis as usual. NHS Lambeth required a portable, but highly adaptable solution. They realised that Axis-Shield was going to be their perfect partner.

"We knew that we needed to get as much done in one visit as possible. That meant having the capacity to test against a range of parameters at once. We also needed to be able to operate an outreach programme to reach more of the available adults in our testing range."

Catherine Kironde, Head of Health Delivery for Lambeth Community Health

Using the glycated haemoglobin (HbA1c) test, the Afinion™ analyser from Axis-Shield enabled PCT staff to test for diabetes in just three minutes – and that represented another key benefit in encouraging attendance.

"If testing is done via the lab rather than using a POC HbA1c test, those identified at the first visit as being at risk of diabetes will have to attend a second time for a fasting plasma glucose and potentially a third time to discuss the result."

Catherine Kironde, Head of Health Delivery for Lambeth Community Health

Clearly the Afinion™ analyser dramatically simplifies this whole process and helps to incentivise attendance. While, at the time of writing, the trial is still in its early days, initial feedback has been extremely positive, with users celebrating the ability it gives them to do everything in one visit. Further details on the likely cost savings it generates will be assessed, in conjunction with the questionnaires, in the first few months of 2011.

Test case

NHS Lambeth has taken delivery of 8 instruments and 1600 cartridges for the pilot. Early indications suggest that the Afinion™ will greatly simplify delivery of the NHS Health Check – and it's hoped that there will be some very positive cost implications too.

Of course, NHS Lambeth's pilot scheme isn't just assessing the viability of POC testing in Lambeth, it's an invaluable test case for PCTs everywhere. With all of them gearing up to devise their own methods for delivering the Health Check as efficiently and effectively as possible, Lambeth's pilot is going to come in for a lot of scrutiny.

With plenty of evidence in favour of glycated haemoglobin testing as the new preferred way to assess the risk of diabetes, and all the advantages of a simpler, quicker, more convenient testing method, it's scrutiny that will be well rewarded.

