

Lewisham Warfarin Management Case Study

Managing patients' warfarin treatment is a time consuming and costly exercise. While it is a relatively straightforward part of the treatment cycle, it still requires multiple hospital visits for small procedures – blood tests, analysis of results and follow-on treatment advice – or else, prolonged appointments that encompass all these stages at once. Up until quite recently, there just hasn't been a viable alternative. But Lewisham Hospital, in conjunction with Axis-Shield UK found one.

The idea for outsourcing warfarin management came from the Quality Manager at Lewisham Hospital, who was concerned at the long waiting lists that built up for warfarin assessment, as well as the long waiting times that patients often had to endure when attending for check-ups. Typically it could take a patient a couple of hours to access all the points on the clinical pathway, from finger prick – to getting the results – to waiting to see a doctor to discuss them.

There were practical issues to address too. The time taken to repeat this process for the 1600 warfarin patients on Lewisham's records (all of whom required multiple check-ups throughout the year) meant a huge requirement on doctor's and phlebotomist's time for a process that could be handled equally well (or even better) in the community. Even more fundamentally, parking spaces at the hospital were at a premium and patients expressed frustration that it was difficult, if not impossible to find spaces within the hospital car park. Taking patients away and replacing outpatient care with community based care would reduce this problem and reduce another of the anxieties normally associated with outpatient visits.

Lewisham Hospital, like many others, used the Thrombotrack monitoring system for their warfarin patients, supplied by Axis-Shield UK. So Rachael Crampton, Service Improvement Manager for Lewisham PCT, got in touch with Jan Macintosh, Senior Product Specialist at Axis-Shield UK to discuss how Thrombotrack could be used to facilitate effective warfarin management in a point of care setting.

It certainly wasn't intended to downplay the importance of regular warfarin management; quite the opposite in fact. With the numbers of patients on warfarin rising by about 10% each year, Rachael and Jan both knew that outsourcing treatment to well-qualified pharmacists worked in everyone's best interests. Waiting lists and waiting times would be cut, and accessing the ongoing care patients needed would be easier and more convenient than ever before.

The pilot

Lewisham Hospital and Axis-Shield UK worked together to devise and implement a trial phase – the anticoagulation pilot – in 2004. The pilot was developed in line with the NHS plan to provide services closer to home; specifically, devolving warfarin care for sections of Lewisham Hospital's patients to two local chemists in Downham and Bellingham.



“Following the pilot, a survey showed overwhelmingly that patients preferred the pharmacy led service. They much preferred not having to go into hospital and particularly loved the quicker turnaround times.” **Jan Macintosh, Senior Product Specialist, Axis-Shield UK**

Patients were extremely complimentary about the service they had received and 75% of respondents reported waiting times of less than 10 minutes. But they also found that the length of consultation was appropriate and that the service was friendlier. Just as importantly, the pharmacists enjoyed the trial too. In particular it was seen as an excellent opportunity to make fuller use of their skills.

Given the comprehensive approval from all parties – as well as the findings of an independent audit set up to ensure the trial proved its worth –the service was rolled out to six local pharmacies.

Taking warfarin management into the community

In keeping with the standards established in the pilot phase, pharmacies that expressed an interest in providing a warfarin clinic had to adhere to certain standards in order to be selected. Among these were the requirements that their pharmacy had an appropriate consultation room, that more than one member of staff was sufficiently trained to carry out the tests, and that they could work alongside the other pharmacies to provide a broad spread of appointment times throughout the week.

In order to achieve a really seamless transition from hospital to pharmacy, the selected pairs of pharmacists all received additional training from Jan Macintosh to ensure their complete understanding of the Thrombotrack system. Jan also attended each pharmacy's first warfarin clinic to help out as and when required.

The big benefits

The pilot scheme established by Lewisham PCT and Axis-Shield UK is still the model in use in the Lewisham pharmacies today, and continues to reap benefits.

“The pharmacy setting gives patients a one-stop-shop solution. We can assess clotting times, check appropriate medication levels and make recommendations for next appointments – anywhere between one day and twelve weeks away, depending on the results – all within a ten minute appointment.”

Darragh Logan, Pharmacy Manager

Even though the appointments are so quick, the consultations aren't rushed. In a hospital setting, each part of the process can be conducted just as quickly, but tend to be separated by extended waiting times in between. The pharmacy setting takes all of that waiting out of the equation. Now, one pharmacist does it all, and patients can routinely be on their way within fifteen minutes of arriving for their appointment.



There are other benefits. The pharmacist now has an expert view on patients' warfarin treatment of course, but they can also assess how it will interact with any other medications that the patient may be required to take, and, if necessary, suggest suitable alternatives. Moreover, the fact that all six participating pharmacies use the same systems and database means that patients can visit any of the pharmacies for a follow-up appointment.

The pharmacies benefit financially for each patient they treat, but also get the chance to exercise their skill sets a lot more. They enjoy closer contact with their patients and get to oversee their care and wellbeing personally.

Of course patients have benefitted most. It is a significantly more relaxing proposition to drop into a local chemist for fifteen minutes than commit a couple of hours or more to a hospital visit. Particularly when you consider that most warfarin patients will need to make a minimum of four appointments every year and typically make eight to ten.

The Thrombotrack system that has enabled this mini revolution also encourages patients to take better care of their own health. Happier patients are significantly more likely to engage with their treatment regimens wholeheartedly, and may even take additional steps to enhance their quality of life.

The shape of things to come

Axis-Shield UK's service to Lewisham continues unabated. Jan continues to provide additional training sessions for new members of staff and Axis-Shield UK continues to support this and other warfarin clinics throughout the country. They're still in a minority, but with so many benefits attached, it can't be long before community-based warfarin clinics become the norm.

