Delivering Innovation in MSK Services

About Connect

Connect Physiotherapy is the leading independent community NHS provider of Musculoskeletal (MSK) physiotherapy services in the UK. With an ageing local population, and increasing pressure on primary and secondary care, we firmly believe more can be done to improve access to MSK services and help NHS patients to better manage their long term conditions in a community setting.

Our organisation is led by clinicians and physiotherapists by background, meaning that clinical excellence and patient outcomes are at the heart of what we do. At Connect Physiotherapy, we pride ourselves on our exceptional standards of patient care, the variety of treatments on offer and short waiting times we achieve for our NHS partners. Moreover, with over twenty years of experience partnering with the NHS, we have developed numerous models of delivery which optimise patient outcomes, whilst also providing value for money; one of which has been the successful pathway designed for the Newcastle West Pilot.

The positive outcomes of the pilot truly demonstrate the benefits to patients and commissioners of collaboration and integration across the health economy. As MSK conditions become increasingly prevalent and GPs are dealing with these conditions in up to one in four consultations, it is imperative to consider how the NHS alongside its partners can do more to respond to these challenges. The Newcastle West Pilot not only shortened the pathway of care for patients, but enabled us to support more patients at less cost through streamlining the process.

Newcastle West Pilot

Connect Physical Health, partnering with Newcastle West Clinical Commissioning Group (NWCCG) and Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust undertook an innovative pilot to reform MSK services locally, with exceptional results.

The need for change:

- In 2008, Connect Physical Health operated a community MSK Clinical Assessment and Treatment Service (CATs) commissioned by NWCCG to move MSK into a community setting
- The service was utilised effectively by some GPs, but not consistently across the board, with many patients still referred unnecessarily to secondary care
- Undifferentiated patients at secondary care resulted in low conversion rates for surgery, and inefficient use of valuable consultant time, resulting in poor outcomes for patients and a strain on NHS budgets
Success of reforms relied upon gaining the confidence of GPs by markedly reducing physiotherapy waits

Reforming the pathway:
- NWCCG commissioned Connect Physical Health to undertake a MSK pilot study for two years in 2011/12, working with 9 local GP surgeries (total patient lists exceeding 77,000)
- GPs referred all patients (other than defined exclusions) to the community service
- The decision to access secondary care would be taken by the MSK CATs service itself
- New physiotherapy services sited in numerous GP practices to improve access and reduce waits
- All referrals coordinated via a specialised referral management call centre, ensuring patients were dealt with promptly and efficiently
- Introduction of a telephone triage to enable patients to access immediate guidance from the comfort of their own home
- Inclusion of sport and exercise medicine and orthopaedic specialists as part of the clinical team to enable patients to access specialist care in the community
- Pilot was pumped-primed to put in place a new and efficient physiotherapy service allowing the existing physiotherapy service to concentrate on a smaller number of practices with the same level of funding

The CCG commissioned the existing CATS provider, Connect Physical Health to operate the whole community pathway for the pilot, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Newcastle West MSK pilot pathway 2011
Key Results:
- Improved Patient Satisfaction - An academic study of the pilot\(^1\) revealed that 96% of patients rated the care they received as ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’ and there were no significant complaints or incidents throughout the 2 years of the pilot.
- Widespread GP support - 97% of GPs interviewed stated the reformed MSK service was ‘better’ or ‘much better’ than the service in 2010.
- Reducing Waiting Times & Improving Delivery - The partnership delivered 62% more patient care in 2012 than 2010, whilst still reducing overall expenditure and waiting times.
- Reducing NHS Costs - The pilot saved the NHS £42k in just six months. If applied to a typical CCG population of 200,000, expected savings would be approximately £220,000, in just one year.
- Direct Access to Surgery - Appropriate referrals and direct access to surgical consultants meant that patients were fast tracked through the pathway, receiving speedier treatment, whilst also making best use of consultants precious time.
- Reduction in Outpatient Activity - As a result of 174% increase in community physio referrals.
- Effective Partnership Working - Partnership working between a CCG, Foundation NHS Trust and an Independent NHS provider can produce excellent results for the NHS.

One of the key objectives of the pilot was to move care into the community. The activity figures in Table 2 show this was achieved with a 40% reduction in GP Orthopaedic outpatient attendances and a 44% reduction in Neurosurgical attendances (SUS data).

Table 1 – Newcastle West CCG, referrals made during April-Sept

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>% Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthopaedics</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>-40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rheumatology</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neurosurgery</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>-44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATS</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>769</td>
<td>+81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiotherapy</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>2356</td>
<td>+174%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,383</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,860</strong></td>
<td><strong>+62%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A corresponding increase in community consultations occurred and notably a large increase in physiotherapy consultations of which 15% were telephone only. Overall there were 62% more patient episodes in 2012, demonstrating that a large number of extra patients received care ranging from telephone advice early in their care through to traditional secondary care attendance.

Patients were not only seen in higher numbers, but waiting times were significantly reduced, including less than 48 hours for physiotherapy telephone triage, and an average wait of 6 days for face to face physiotherapy – both important in tackling problems early and reducing chronicity.

GP feedback included the following:

“Both professionally and on behalf of the overwhelming majority of our patients we have found this community based service to deliver both in accessibility, responsiveness and quality. In all respects this service delivers significant added value for our patients with MSK problems” Dr David Black

\(^1\) The Newcastle West Community MSK Pilot, Dr. Graeme Wilkes, Published 2nd May 2013
“The service was a doorway to joined up treatment for a wide range of muscular and bone problems. I enjoyed being kept well informed of my patient’s progress”
Dr Mike Scott

“Speed of appointments - excellent” Dr David Howarth

Benefits for connect physiotherapy

- Connect as an organisation benefitted mainly from the relationships that developed through a project in partnership with the local Hospital Foundation Trust and the local GPs who commissioned the pilot service. The outcome of a strong level of trust between these organisations bodes well for the future. Each organisation has undoubtedly been able to dispel some untruths about adverse philosophy and intensions as regards NHS provision and start to work together for patient and NHS institution benefit.

- Connect also benefitted by being able to apply a supremely efficient service and pathway for a whole community service. The experience and outcomes have given us confidence to move forward and continue to innovate and influence others. Since starting the pilot we have entered into three formal partnerships with other Hospital Foundation Trusts who have been impressed by our partnership knowledge and experience for which the Newcastle West Pilot is a tangible piece of evidence.

Lessons from Newcastle West

- The principles of the Newcastle West pilot can be applied across the country
- The Newcastle West pathway is one of many innovative approaches which can improve MSK delivery
- It is imperative in undertaking MSK pathway reform to communicate and build confidence with primary care, secondary clinicians and providers
- Significant potential financial benefits to reforming MSK, and this should be a priority for any CCG
- Improved capacity can be delivered without the need for significant investment

Newcastle West CCG applied the guidance from the MSK Framework during a two year pilot and proved that more patients could be treated at a reduced overall cost using this model. Data gathered during the pilot revealed that quality of care had not suffered and indeed the GP’s in Newcastle West reflected back so positively that the pilot model has already been extended into 2013 with plans to utilise the model more permanently.

To see a video case study with more information on the Newcastle West Pilot:
http://youtu.be/GM2g_uRvEcs