

## Improving Access to Psychological Therapies

“Improving Access to Psychological Therapies” may prove to be one of the most important strategies of the National Health Service for people who suffer some of the more common mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

Success could provide quicker and more sustained improvements in health and well-being, substantially improving people’s chances of staying in / returning to work or enjoying greater community participation.

At South Tyneside NHS Primary Care Trust we have recognised that if our Stepped Care Plan is to deliver greater care to those Patients suffering Mental Health problems, then we need to re-design how we deliver our Services.

Some of our key questions included:

1. How could we better engage with our General Practitioners?
2. How could we prove that our service improvement ideas deserved the full support of their Practice Based Commissioning?
3. How could we design, develop, and deliver Patient pathways that substantially improved Patient choice and provided quicker access to Psychological Therapies?
4. How could we optimise the availability of Staff and the development of their clinical skills for the benefit of our Patients?
5. To what extent did we need to engage skills best offered by the Voluntary Sector or via Service Level Agreements with Independent providers?
6. How could we test the impact on Service delivery if our talents and time were focused more on one Therapy, such as CBT, and less on another?
7. What-if our GP’s changed their referral behaviour as access to psychological therapies improved?

These were questions that our traditional planning tools were not able to answer - we needed to find new ways of designing processes that achieved better Patient Flow, delivered greater Care, were supported by our Staff, and provided better value-for-money.

We decided, therefore, to engage the expertise of an external organisation, ‘Focused\_On Health’, and to bring their PatientFlow Planning and simulation FlowModelling tools in-house. This has already been acknowledged as an excellent decision.

We have used the PatientFlow Planning software to design and document when and where Therapy Services are going to be delivered as part of our Stepped Care Plan, and this has helped us to secure clinical support at the outset. In addition to data that quantify the number, duration, and frequency of Therapies, our process maps actually provide GP’s and staff with electronic access to key documents like PHQ9 and CORE.

We quickly gained a more detailed and more rigorous understanding of which skills and resources were currently available and where the gaps in services were, but this in itself couldn’t help us to plan how to optimise the skills and experience of our Staff alongside external Advisors and Counsellors.

We have, therefore, used our PatientFlows and the professional services of ‘Focused\_On Health’ to design and calibrate a simulation FlowModel which means we can actually see the likely impact of our decisions on the process dynamics.

Now, we can quickly and easily measure the Queues & Wait Times likely to be experienced by Patients and test the expected benefits of sharply focused recruitment, dedicated Service Level Agreements, and investing in our Staff and deploying their new skills for the benefit of our Patients.

With these new tools and our new ways of working, it will be much easier in future to optimise our Local Delivery Plans with the Mental Health Services demanded by local Practised Based Commissioning.

We are confident that extending the PatientFlow and FlowModelling work that we have already done will help South Tyneside NHS Primary Care Trust to improve significantly Patient access to psychological therapies and that greater levels of Care will be sustained through better value-for-money processes.