



Turning on nursing innovation to improve care and efficiency

As the deadline for the 2011 NHS Innovation Challenge approaches, Carol Davis looks at how senior nurses can help staff to realise their bright ideas

THIS MONTH marks the deadline for applications for the NHS Innovation Challenge Prizes, aimed at addressing some of Britain's largest health and social care issues using the talent of NHS front-line staff.

These are exciting times, therefore, for nurse managers, who are tasked with harnessing this talent and encouraging the development and spread of ideas to deliver better patient outcomes. The challenges are wide ranging and demanding. They include a better-management-of-pregnancy challenge, aimed at achieving a 10 per cent reduction in pre-term births through better risk management (see panel, page 7).

This follows research, funded by baby charity Tommy's, showing that premature births cost the UK economy £939 million a year and that delaying all pre-term birth by one week could save £260 million a year.

Unlike many award schemes, the prizes target specified challenges, ranging from significant improvements in delivery to major clinical breakthroughs, and fresh challenges will be added through the year. All are aimed at supporting innovation in the NHS, and helping staff to develop and disseminate it to achieve better patient outcomes.

Track record

Health secretary Andrew Lansley paid tribute to the NHS track record of innovation in March, when he launched the Innovation in Outcomes Competition. He said: 'The NHS is full of talented people. We need to foster a culture that supports innovation. This is crucial for a modern NHS, which puts patients first and achieves outcomes that are consistently among the best in the world.'

The competition focuses on measuring outcomes for recovery from stroke and

on the experiences of health care among children and young people.

Earlier this year, the RCN Frontline First Innovation Award also highlighted outstanding examples of nurse-led innovation.

Marina Lupari, of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, was the overall winner. The trust's assistant director for nursing established a chronic illness case-management service as a new model of community nursing. Ms Lupari's innovation achieved a total saving of more than £400,000 over the nine-month follow-up period, with an average cost reduction of almost £1,500 per patient, as well as greater patient satisfaction.

Vantage point

Nurse managers have a unique vantage point that enables them to bring about innovation, says senior innovation manager at NHS Innovations South East (NISE) David Lubega. 'Nurse managers are able to identify needs and the most effective way of dealing with challenges, both old and new, and they are key to driving efficiency,' he says.

He works with clinicians, nurse managers and commercial partners, and has access to pump priming and proof-of-concept funding to test how innovation is likely to improve efficiency and patient care.

'Nurse managers are uniquely positioned to identify need and improve efficiency, and advance innovation,' Dr Lubega adds. He points out that clinicians innovate all the time and that nurse managers are often the staff who make sure that good ideas are turned into practice.

Many do this by working with NHS Innovations, the eight regional hubs of which now champion innovation in the NHS, and help staff to develop and commercialise their innovative ideas.

Like the other NHS Innovations hubs, NISE works with acute trusts and staff to

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Current NHS Innovation Challenges

The NHS Innovation Challenges scheme provides an opportunity to reward clinical advances such as the development of new treatments for life-threatening conditions and new ways to deliver care and promote healthy living, aimed at improving NHS performance quickly. They are:

- Better management of pregnancy: achieving a 10 per cent reduction in pre-term births through better risk management.
- Reducing waste, increasing benefits: halving avoidable medicines waste, and improving adherence to high-cost and critical-medicine regimens.
- Reducing the incidence of meticillin-

sensitive *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Escherichia coli* bacteraemias by 30 per cent.

- Increasing independence for patients with kidney failure.
- Ensuring earlier cancer diagnosis.
- Increasing the number of people who receive emergency care in the right place by ensuring they receive the best urgent and emergency care with the fewest admissions and follow-up appointments.
- Reducing the number of avoidable attendances at GP surgeries and other primary care settings by 20 per cent, with no reduction in quality of service.

develop proposals, many of which achieve commercial success and thereby generate income for the inventors, their trusts and their commercial partners. Disseminated nationally and internationally, these innovations can result in huge efficiency savings, as well as improvements in patient care and outcomes.

Awards can give a huge boost to nurse innovation and promote the dissemination of tools to increase healthcare efficiency, says Dee Waterhouse, nurse consultant at Central Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and a 2008 winner of the North West NHS Innovations Awards, run by TrusTECH.

Working with other senior nurse members, Ms Waterhouse who was then champion for infection control in the renal unit, worked with Jean Winterbottom, education and development practitioner at the trust, to develop the Multi Racial Visual Inspection Catheter Tool Observation Record (Mr Victor).

The work was prompted by a clinical need to identify infection in central venous catheters, initially in renal patients. The tool encourages nurses to make checks for infection consistently across different ethnic groups, working to improve patient safety and reduce infection and length of stay.

Developing the tool meant working with the trust's equality and diversity unit, and extensive testing of the tool in different populations to make sure it worked for all nurses.

From one idea that was developed and applied systematically in a single clinical setting, Mr Victor came to the attention of the renal unit's lead nurse, who encouraged Ms Waterhouse and Ms Winterbottom to apply for the TrusTECH award. She also took the idea to meetings, where other lead nurses saw how it could be used generically.

Mr Victor is now used across the trust, and elsewhere too. In the renal unit, where Ms Waterhouse works, infection rates have dropped as awareness and use of the tool have increased. Ms Waterhouse also thinks that developing the tool has helped to raise her profile in the trust, and the dissemination of Mr Victor has been encouraged by the award publicity.

Radical

The most radical ideas come from clinical need with thorough managerial input to put them into practice, agrees Resham Khun-Khun, interim head of foot-health services at the Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust.

As then clinical services manager of the local district nursing team, which included staff of the hospital-at-home service, she developed an idea for a portable intravenous (IV) therapy stand for use in community settings. This is now in use across Wolverhampton and on the NHS supply chain as an NHS Innovation.

The idea came from clinicians who had struggled to transport hospital stands to people's homes, says Ms Khun-Khun, who

recognised the value of in-house innovation and who used her managerial skills to implement the idea.

'We wanted something that would be durable and lightweight for use in a community setting, which would be quick and easy to assemble, which would meet infection control requirements and which would be safe to leave in patients' homes. This means a lot more freedom for patients in terms of their treatment, and makes the job much easier for nurses.'

Ms Khun-Khun worked with clinicians to develop the lightweight portable Hoo-kOn IV-therapy stand to replace cumbersome hospital drip stands. This involved developing a prototype, testing its durability with help from MidTECH, one of the NHS Innovations hubs, and then piloting it. She also had to win the backing of her trust, who worked with manufacturer Medical Devices Technology International (MDTi) to patent the product and start producing it on a large scale.

The key, Ms Khun-Khun thinks, was making sure that clinicians are involved throughout. 'My role was to engage with clinicians on the front line. They are the ones with the ideas and who know what will and will not work. My role was to challenge them in a constructive way and work with them to keep the idea on track.'

While the original design came from clinicians, and Ms Khun-Khun developed the project, MDTi took the original design and, working with MidTECH and the University of Wolverhampton, created a successful prototype. Ms Khun-Khun and her team are now developing another idea.

At a time when innovation awards and challenges are prompting nurse managers to develop ideas arising from clinical need to improve efficiency and patient care, it seems likely that many more will respond to these prompts and to the opportunities to disseminate them more widely.

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Find out more

For details of the NHS Innovation Challenge Prizes, go to www.challengeprizes.institute.nhs.uk