



# Quality of care or financial success? You can have both

Ascom's **Robert Wood** discusses the need to embrace new technology to improve patient care.

"I'd rather be hung for money than for quality and safety." What a profound statement, a statement which has resonated with me for a while. It was from an NHS leader who responded to research done by Nuffield Trust a year on from the Mid Staffs inquiry, a statement which has provoked me to write this article.

The NHS is the largest and the oldest single-payer healthcare system in the world and for decades it has been operating like any other business – aiming to reduce overheads, meet targets, stay out of the red and improve on the bottom line. But what exactly is the 'bottom line' for the NHS? For years the focus has been on money – making best use of public money and avoiding penalties. Surely the goalposts have moved now. Surely it's not all about money. I can see the shock in your eyes as you read this! I'm not saying that financial resources are endless; you just need to spend what you have in a more efficient manner. I am aware it's public money and even more aware there needs to be a £20bn saving by 2015. But hasn't this focus on money caused us to lose sight of what is most important – caring for the patient.

## Keeping focus

With patients having more freedom about where they can receive their treatment, surely the quality of care should be the bottom line. Now I'm not saying you should forget that you have targets to meet, but the focus does need to come back to the patient.

You have patients saying "I want to know my nurse is there when I need them" and you have nurses saying "I want to spend more time with my patients". It's all about releasing time to care.

## Keeping perspective

Let's put it into perspective: what would be your defining factor for selecting a hospital in which your family would receive treatment? You wouldn't base it on which hospital is saving the most money.

You'd hope to select a hospital which has a proven track record for providing a better level of care, and that's where quality of care trumps finance – that is also how a patient thinks; they don't care about your financial challenges, their concern is that they will come out of hospital in a better condition than when they went in.

## Keeping quality of care high

Let's look at the issue of quality of care, a very hot topic and a key concern highlighted by the Francis report last year – a powerful report which has marked a turning-point in the history of the NHS and yet it will take years for the NHS culture to change. The NHS must start adopting new ways of working and getting rid of the 'this is how it's always been done' attitude. We have to remember at the end of the day the NHS is all about providing care.

Processes shouldn't come before humans; we should be making patient care the only process. Evidence already shows if patients choose hospitals where they feel comfortable and confident, it's likely to improve both the result of their treatment and their experience in hospital.

## Keeping it real

So how can you ensure this? Surely it will cost you money. The NHS is so scared to spend public money and get it wrong – and who wouldn't

be. What if I was to tell you an improvement on a single process can save millions? That one process can offer an improved experience for thousands of patients and staff. Have I caught your interest? I hope so. It seems there is a need to see immediate return-on-investment but in some cases this just isn't feasible. Investment needs to be made with the aim of providing efficiencies and a return on investments over a longer period of time.

This short-term thinking needs to change, as return-on-investment can take years to be realised.

## Keep embracing new technology

Now more than ever there is a need to embrace technology to improve patient care. With so much technology and solutions with proven benefits available it makes me wonder why this isn't being taken advantage of. If a solution has a proven track record for providing a benefit whether that's in the UK or worldwide, it must be worth investing in.

Make the investment. Drive it forward. Believe that you have implemented the best technology there is to serve your patients better. Get rid of the 'this is how it's always been done' attitude. And first and foremost speak to companies which deliver a cost-effective solution to quality of care.

Companies like Ascom specialise in this – we can bridge the gap between high quality care in a way which is both affordable and sustainable.



Robert Wood

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