Serco leaves Suffolk Community Healthcare in excellent shape

30 September 2015

Serco’s three-year contract to deliver community health services in Suffolk on behalf of the NHS comes to close today, when the service is handed over to a new Consortium made up of West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust and Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust. Despite some initial operational challenges Serco is proud to hand over a safe and high-performing service, arguably one of the best in the country.

The company is now consistently hitting 98% of the contractual targets set by the customer, which are more onerous than anything else in the country, and independent survey results show that 99% of patients and carers would recommend the service to their friends and family (Friends & Family Test, a nationwide NHS survey, July 2015).

Over the past three years, Serco has made substantial investments in the large and complex service leading to improvements for both clinicians and patients. For example, in a first for the NHS, Serco centralised administration to create a single, 24-hour a day, Care Co-ordination Centre, which receives and manages referrals from GPs, Acute Hospitals and patients. This modern system, combined with the introduction of new mobile technology for frontline staff, has meant clinicians can spend less time on paperwork and up to 30% more time with patients doing what they do best.

Serco have also significantly improved staff training and brought a level of rigor and scrutiny to performance management, management information and data capture processes. This has resulted in managers and team leaders having a greater understanding of their team’s performance and the quality of services they are providing, enabling staff to identify where and how things need to improve and measure their successes.

Serco’s Abi Tierney, Chief Executive of Suffolk Community Healthcare commented:

“I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved and thank the team for all their hard work and dedication. Serco hands over a safe and high-performing service which 99% of patients and carers would recommend to their friends and family. While there have been some challenges along the way, we have gone above and beyond the contact to give the people of Suffolk the best...
possible community health service. We have patients first and made substantial investments in the service and our people; innovations like the Care Co-ordination Centre will leave a lasting and positive legacy. We have been working closely with the incoming team to ensure a smooth transfer and wish them every success for the future. There is a tremendous amount of learning to be taken from our time in Suffolk which will be used to inform and shape Serco’s future health business.”

The contract for community health services in Suffolk was awarded by NHS Suffolk to Serco for a period from 1 October 2012 to 30 September 2015. In 2014, Serco made the difficult decision not to rebid the contract.

Selection of quotes from employees

Pam Chappell, Director of Nursing, Therapies and Governance said:

“Bringing the cultures of an NHS organisation together with a private, albeit public services organisation proved challenging initially. However after a difficult first year, and a change in leadership which then focused on listening, valuing and respecting staff views together, we found that we had common ground - providing a high quality and safe service to patients and customers. Serco invested in patient safety systems in our community hospitals and supported the safer staffing agenda by ensuring our hospital staffing ratio's reflected national guidance. We have faced difficulties in recruiting to increased staffing levels - a challenge faced equally by NHS and private organisations. The future is to build on the legacy that Serco leaves behind and ensure that the focus on quality and safe care continues as we integrate across acute and community boundaries.”

Dawn Godbold, Director of Operations and Deputy CEO said:

“With services traditionally being provided as part of the NHS, the transfer of the community services contract to a private organisation was an opportunity to bring new ideas, approaches, and learning into the NHS as well as challenge to our traditional ways of working. During the last three years Serco have brought a level of rigor and scrutiny to our performance, management information and data capture processes. This has resulted in managers and team leaders having a greater understanding of their team’s performance and the quality of services they are providing. This allows us to identify where and how things need to improve and measure our successes.”
There are some important principles of how a private sector company ‘go about their business’ that will be important to ensure are transferred with us back to the NHS.”

Scott Wootton, Care Co-ordination Centre & Support Services Manager commented:

“I joined the team in August 2013 and the last two years have been quite a journey; we have had some challenging times - specifically periods of low staff engagement, high sickness and poor performance against our targets - however we are transformed compared to our position two years ago. We are now performing to the highest level in three years with almost all our targets being achieved and 99% of patients and carers stating that they would recommend the service to their friends and family! We have done this by focussing on the patient’s needs; improving our financial situation; concentrating on our KPI’s; and building relationships with healthcare professionals and colleagues. Working for Suffolk Community Healthcare has been a great experience for me personally and I have learnt a lot from Serco in the time I have been here. I hope we can continue to deliver the service as safely, effectively and efficiently with our new provider.”

Sam Girling, Facilities Officer, said:

“It’s not all been plain sailing, but overall there’s been some real positive changes. Before, as outside contractor, we felt separate to the community health team but Serco brought us in-house, merging the east and west facilities teams, so we really feel part of the organisation. We now have better links with the infection control team, as well as better HR tools and management information, and I’m proud to say that all our community hospitals now have a 5-star rating for catering and very high hygiene scores too. It's also been great having an approachable and hands-on CEO.”

Ends

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Notes to editors

1. Serco has provided the following NHS community health services under the contract:
   • Adult Community Services (nursing, therapies and specialist services)
Media Release

- Four Community Hospitals and a Minor Injuries Unit
- Community Equipment
- Community Wheelchairs
- Specialist Paediatric Services
- Dentistry
- Care Co-ordination Centre

About Serco
Serco is a leading provider of public services. Our customers are governments or others operating in the public sector. We gain scale, expertise and diversification by operating internationally across five sectors and four geographies: Defence, Justice & Immigration, Transport, Health and Citizen Services, delivered in UK & Europe, North America, Asia Pacific and the Middle East.

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