

Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust chooses competences to support Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease care

Skills for Health

Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust has set its sights on improving Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) services and supporting integrated respiratory care for people across the region. The Trust aims to make the change by revising service provision within primary care and secondary care using appropriately skilled staff in its nurse led COPD team.



Joanne Riley, countywide lead for respiratory nurses at Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust, explains why the PCT's COPD team is taking a closer look at using accredited National Occupation Standards as a way to enhance current staff recruitment, training and development practices:

“Using COPD NOS will help to ensure a standardised approach, so all staff have the appropriate skills to deliver intervention along a spectrum of COPD symptoms, which can be complex and linked to many other conditions.”

The Trust has been reviewing competences for COPD, developed by Skills for Health with the input of clinicians, specialists and consultants across the UK. Having seen the advantages of using a competence based approach to role design and service development, managers are convinced it's the way ahead for improving COPD service provision across Oxfordshire.

Increasing demand for a growing service

The COPD team started nine years ago with two nurses. Now it has seven band 6 nurses, three band 5 nurses, a physiotherapist and 1.6 WTE Administrative staff who provide services in a range of settings including patients' homes and intermediate care settings.

The COPD team link with 50+ GP practices, synchronising activities so that patients receive care and treatment, whether referred from hospital, clinics or GP services.

Oxfordshire COPD services cover a wide remit, as might be expected. Personalised care planning; support and advice for COPD individuals, families and carers; optimising patient care for all the stages of COPD from early detection, through their long term condition, to palliative and end of life care; physiotherapy support; pulmonary rehabilitation; and smoking cessation classes are delivered in addition to interventions and assessments. Oxygen assessment is also an integral part of the service.

With such heavy demands on COPD services, it's vital that managers can pinpoint skills needed by staff, and that each member of the team reaches the required standard of competency, for patient safety, and to maintain a high quality service.

Supporting vital skills and service specification

Using competences as 'building blocks', managers can determine required skills, the levels of staff needed, and establish which competences are core, required and essential at certain grades. Such an approach allows for consistency and provides clarity on what is expected in each role. It also facilitates and informs locally sensitive recruitment of appropriate staff with the right skills, knowledge and understanding, to complement the current skill mix, whilst establishing a high standard of consistency across the service:

“By embedding NOS in role outlines and job descriptions, we can achieve clarity around activities that can be carried out by all grades such as administering oxygen, and which more specialised activities should be carried out by higher grades, such as assessing blood gases. In short, it means we can understand our team’s capabilities, identify skills gaps, put in training to address gaps, and support more effective deployment of staff according to the complexity of patient needs.”

There is a requirement for lone working, and the NOS will enable managers to assess when staff are ready to take on this way of working, and to put in additional training so individuals can carry out their duties confidently and safely. The units of competence assessment facilitate a clear evidence based way of showing that each individual can provide high quality service with respect to their job description and role in the team.

Building the service for the future

Using COPD NOS will also facilitate a newly refocused service specification, as Joanne outlines:

“Our current specification is very broad, and using NOS means we can clearly define what the COPD service will provide, how, where and evidence the skills we need to deliver this. I would expect this to have a positive effect on service commissioning, and help to drive up the quality of care.”

The Trust anticipates using the COPD NOS for appraisal in the personal review process, identifying learning needs, and supporting planned development. As Joanne comments:

“The sooner we can begin to use the NOS, the sooner we can begin to strengthen and support the team, and enhance our service provision to people with COPD needs in Oxfordshire.”

The logo for Skills for Health, featuring the text "Skills for Health" in a white sans-serif font inside a white rounded square shape, set against a dark blue background.

Skills for Health is the Sector Skills Council for all health sector employers: NHS, independent and third sector. Since 2002 we've been working with employers to get the right people, with the right skills, in the right place at the right time. We are the authoritative voice on skills issues for the health sector and offer proven workforce solutions and tools - with the expertise and experience to use them effectively. To find out more about our unique competence-based approach to workforce transformation and how we can help you drive up productivity and quality visit www.skillsforhealth.org.uk

Tel: 0117 922 1155

E-mail: info@skillsforhealth.org.uk

www.skillsforhealth.org.uk