

‘WorkPAL’ – a response to the Francis Inquiry Report

The much anticipated Francis Inquiry Report ⁽¹⁾ was published on 6th February 2013. Within the report, Robert Francis Q.C. has made 290 sweeping recommendations to the NHS, from ward level through to management, from commissioning onwards to the Department of Health. Throughout the report is a common theme – that of fundamental cultural change. But how do organisations assess their existing culture and most importantly, look to change it in a way that engages their staff from initiation through to continuous improvement? At Thirsty Horses we believe we have a solution... ‘WorkPAL’ can assist organisations in enabling that cultural change by directly addressing many of the recommendations in the Francis Inquiry Report.

One of the most important of the recommendations is expressed in the Executive Summary Table of Recommendations under the heading of ‘Putting the patient first’. Here, Robert Francis mentions ‘clarity of values and principles’ as a mechanism to ensuring that patients are the priority. WorkPAL collects data from the lowest workforce level upwards, capturing clear key metrics agreed by leaders and their staff regarding, for example, quality. Core values and standards can easily be adopted throughout WorkPAL in a language that is meaningful to an employee no matter what grade, band or role they hold. This offers real-time analysis of behaviours and objectives – data that can be acted upon immediately. Recent evidence has shown that the proportion of staff receiving well-structured appraisals is related to patient satisfaction, patient mortality, staff absenteeism and turnover, and better performance ⁽²⁾.

‘Fundamental standards of behaviour’ are mentioned in the report and are the foundation to an initial appraisal that can evaluate aptitude for particular roles within the organisation. The WorkPAL approach is that of gently easing staff into the appraisal process by initially assessing these behaviours before introducing objectives. The process can be started any time of the year and continuous regular evaluation is utilised, rather than annualised box ticking exercises. Staff will feel more engaged and more empowered. ‘Happy and motivated staff equals happy patients’ ⁽³⁾.

The Francis Inquiry Report calls for a system of revalidation for registered nurses similar to that being used by the General Medical Council. WorkPAL already delivers appraisals to General Medical Council standards, so should the Nursing and Midwifery Council introduce such a system in the future, WorkPAL can easily be developed to adopt these changes.

Notwithstanding the suggested changes, ‘Evidence’ is another key piece of functionality within the WorkPAL system that already provides all staff across the whole organisation with a way of recording their achievements. This can be work that has been recognised by a patient for example, or delivery of an initiative on time and under budget. The evidence can quickly be captured and linked to a Behaviour, Objective, or piece of Personal Development.

The WorkPAL appraisal process promotes all three characteristics of ‘openness, transparency and candour’ from the initial self-assessment of behaviours through to objective planning, agreement of learning and personal development, 360 appraisals, performance management, and more. Personal ownership of the process is fostered at the outset that in turn promotes individual responsibility and accountability.

Personal Development can also be mapped to individual Behaviours and Objectives so that you can gauge the improvement over time. WorkPAL can review the internal provision of learning based on tracking how a learning intervention is affecting performance. We can also highlight lateness and non-compliance for statutory and mandatory Personal Development and we can forecast blocks of staff for renewals to get cost-effective training delivered. Right person, right training, right time = safer patients.

Furthermore, the Learning and Development module provides internal and externally linked courses that allow for focussed and organisationally agreed training that is role-specific for an individual and further promotes “a common culture made real throughout the system”⁽¹⁾.

WorkPAL will provide the data that the Board requires to evidence that the appropriate training, development and education is taking place to ultimately assure that the Trust has a competent, qualified and safe workforce.

Uptake and usage of WorkPAL couldn't be simpler for staff. An easy 'social networking' type approach that sits inside the organisation's walls is used and shows staff what they need to be doing – not drowning them in unnecessary information. This means that it is accessible anywhere – at work, home and on the move, including via tablet and Smartphone technologies. We can also link into any existing HR and/or payroll system, including ESR.

Finally, the above discussion highlights just some of the ways in which WorkPAL can address some of the recommendations of the Francis Inquiry Report. By integrating a tool such as WorkPAL into your organisational processes, a foundation and framework will be set to ensure that 'all who work to provide patient care, from porters and cleaners to the Secretary of State, will be working effectively in partnership in a common and positive culture'⁽¹⁾.



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References:

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2. Dawson JF, West MA, Admasachew L, Topakas A (2011). *NHS Staff Management and Health Service Quality: Results from the NHS Staff Survey and related data*. Report to the Department of Health. Available at: www.dh.gov.uk/health/2011/08/nhs-staff-management/
3. Health Education England. *Introducing Health Education England: Our Strategic Intent*. 2013. Available at: <https://www.wp.dh.gov.uk/healtheducationengland/files/2013/02/Our-Strategic-Intent-web-Jan2013.pdf>