



Why building a new
culture of care
can also help reduce costs

white paper



Why building a new culture of care

can also help reduce costs
white paper



In his covering letter to The Secretary of State for Health, Robert Francis asserts that “The extent of the failure of the system shown in this report suggests that a fundamental culture change is needed”. The government response to the report has called for the NHS to make changes in many areas - while still expecting managers to find £20 billion in efficiency savings.

Tim Sheppard, Head of Healthcare Unipart Expert Practices, contends that a change in culture, designed to improve front-line patient care, can also help in unlocking significant savings.

Those that provide good care and oversee well-run and safe hospitals have nothing to fear from the Francis Report. However its first recommendation is for everyone in the NHS urgently to consider and review what happens in their own organisation and identify any actions they may need to take, to ensure that what happened in Stafford does not happen in their hospital.

The Report highlights the importance of establishing a new culture of caring, commitment and compassion that permeates all levels of the healthcare system.

Organisations across the NHS have recognised that there are serious problems identified by the Mid Staffs report.

Chris Hopson, CEO of the Foundation Trust Network, acknowledges that, “It is clear that pockets of poor care do exist right the way across the NHS. Hopefully the Francis Report will now help us get to the nub of why poor care continues despite persistent attempts by trusts to resolve this complex problem.”

The NHS Confederation also recognises the nature of the challenge: “Our members believe that patient care is everyone’s responsibility. This is why implementing some of the recommendations in this report will be difficult, but the right thing to do.”

There is broad agreement that the whole system needs to be aligned around quality objectives, which must include the positive and open culture required to deliver them. As the NHS Confederation puts it, “This will also require challenging the blame culture that often characterises the NHS at all levels.”

Why building a new culture of care

can also help reduce costs
white paper

The need to empower front line staff

The importance of empowering front-line staff with the responsibility and freedom to deliver safe care is another recommendation endorsed by a wide range of commentators.

Writing in The Times, Professor Lord Darzi states, “It is the system’s responsibility to unlock the potential for high quality care, to enable it to be delivered and to shine a light on results so there is honesty, openness and truth. High-quality care cannot be mandated from on high; to think it can is a dangerous delusion.”

The NHS confederation comments, “More broadly, we concur with Robert Francis’ view that the whole system must now revolve around quality and that top-down management is no longer viable.”

While, in his regular column, Dr Phil Hammond contends, “Doctors and nurses must motivate and inspire those around us. We’ve learnt that large, distant regulators and centralised management don’t work. Great care comes from motivated staff with good training and working conditions, who listen to patients and aren’t afraid to speak up about problems.”

Finding a way of empowering front-line staff and creating a new culture of openness and transparency, with a common set of core values and standards, is a big challenge for any organisation. We know, because we have gone through that same journey of transformation in our own company.

Learning from industry

We believe that the lessons we learned and the experience we gained in successfully transforming our own culture, can help the NHS address some of the needs set out in the Francis Report

Originally, we were part of a vast state –owned car company with a reputation for inconsistent quality and very difficult employee relations. When we became independent from British Leyland, over 20 years ago, it was clear that we

needed to find a different way of working - and a new approach towards our employees. While this new way included the principles of Lean thinking, it was fundamentally a move from ‘command and control’ to the beginning of ‘employee engagement’. We believed that by taking this approach, the people in our existing workforce would reveal their capacity to help build a world class company. Creating a new way of working, with a common set of core values and standards, would be the key to unlocking that hidden potential.

Why building a new culture of care

can also help reduce costs
white paper

Requirements for building a new culture

We set out to build a culture that inspired and enabled all our people to go the extra mile and actively seek opportunities for continuous improvement in all that they do, for the benefit of themselves, the organisation and its customers. Over the last twenty years we have learned what creating this sort of culture entails, as we extended it from our factories to all our other areas of operation:

- It means starting to share information on performance openly with employees.
 - It means supporting them in speaking out about the problems they are finding and encouraging them to suggest ways of taking action.
 - It means substituting a culture of blame with a collaborative search for the root cause of a problem
- It means bringing together cross-functional groups and listening to their views on the reasons for these problems and then encouraging and supporting their ideas for improving both quality and productivity.
 - It means empowering and motivating all employees to start solving problems at their own level and providing them with the methods and training to do so.

The result is that everyone at every level now shares the responsibility of bringing forward ideas that can increase quality, improve processes or reduce waste. The problems they can see are usually invisible to managers. Often they are small changes but, over time, they build to produce significant results. This culture has the aim of continuous improvement at its core. Innovation is not an occasional event; it can happen every day as staff are encouraged to look out for opportunities that arise from their everyday work. It generates an ethos we call 'No problem is a problem.'

Benefits when employees engage with a new culture

Achieving this level of change and sustaining it for the future, is a big challenge for any organisation. Unless there is a proper structure in place short term benefits can be lost and the grass simply grows back. At Unipart, we learned that it requires a different management approach and the adoption of a new way of working.

Over the years we have brought together all our learning, and the many techniques we use, into a method that we call The Unipart Way. We have

seen the results of implementing the Unipart Way across our own companies; a factory improved from one of Britain's worst to being voted one of Britain's best; a traditional UK rail company found new ways of saving Network Rail £25 million; a warehouse was recognised by a senior client as having become "better than world class." Our levels of staff retention and employee engagement are high, with widespread ownership of continuous improvement that has helped reduce our cost base by an average of £3m every year, whilst growing our top line revenues.

Why building a new culture of care

can also help reduce costs
white paper

An approach that can be adapted to the needs of the NHS

We believe that these lessons from industry can be successfully adapted to the needs of the NHS, as it is an approach that starts with a deep belief in people.

Indeed, where Unipart has had the opportunity to work closely with the NHS, the Unipart Way has shown its ability to create engagement and culture change at all levels and with clinicians and administrators alike. The outcome in those hospitals adopting the approach has been not only a significant improvement in patient services but also substantial savings in costs. More than £9m in efficiency and productivity gains were achieved by one Trust, with a further £1.5m reduction in payroll as a result of reduced absenteeism.

We have repeatedly found that front line staff have the best ideas of how to solve problems and create improvements, so we engage them from the start. We have helped them actively own and manage the quality of what they do, by using metrics and visual management. We have worked together with them to identify waste and eliminate unnecessary activities that detract from patient care and safety. Directly engaging staff in this approach to process improvement creates ownership and builds cultural change, as well as saving cost.

The benefits that the NHS could see

The key benefits the NHS should expect to see through adopting this approach are:

- Frontline staff taking real ownership of improving the quality and safety of patient care
- Greater employee engagement, leading to higher staff retention and lower absenteeism
- More cross functional teamwork, with less of a silo mentality
- Regular innovation right across the workplace that directly supports the needs of patients and the goals of the Trust
- Productivity improvements which improve patient satisfaction and also deliver cost savings
- An improved working environment, based on calm efficiency and a respect for the contribution of others

Unlocking the hidden potential and ideas of everyone in the NHS can play a major role in helping build a new culture of care - but it could also be the best way of finding a whole new range of opportunities for efficiency savings.

For more information please
contact Tim or visit our
website,

email: tim.sheppard@unipart.com

call: 07768 462524

www.unipartconsulting.com



About Tim Sheppard

Tim leads the Healthcare team at Unipart Expert Practices and has a long history of delivering transformation programmes in the NHS for Acute, Mental Health and Community Care organisations.

In his early career Tim worked in humanitarian and consultancy roles in Greece, Bosnia, Croatia, Hungary, Kenya and Rwanda.