

SHEFFIELD

MICROSYSTEMS

COACHING

ACADEMY

-
- Led by Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, in partnership with The Dartmouth Institute Microsystem Academy, Sheffield Health and Social Care NHS Foundation Trust, and Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust.
 - Based within Sheffield Teaching Hospitals and the Children's Hospital.

INTRODUCTION

The clinical microsystems methodology was developed in the USA by The Dartmouth Institute and has been used globally to develop sustainable healthcare improvements in quality of care and efficiency.

The Sheffield Microsystem Coaching Academy is an innovative initiative

where frontline staff train as improvement coaches and work with teams to help them improve the quality and value of care they deliver to patients. They do this through understanding their systems and processes, and redesigning care through testing small changes.

WHY DID THEY DO THIS PROJECT?

As health care needs continue to increase, the systems need to adapt to changing conditions and focus on providing value in care. A key question for many organisations is how to build quality improvement work into the everyday work on the frontline – so that it is seen as ‘the way we do things around here’, rather than additional or optional aspects of work.

Clinical microsystems are the building blocks of organisations such as hospitals and can be characterised as the small units where care happens with a group of patients, for example wards, outpatient clinics and diagnostic departments.

The Shared Purpose project team at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust saw the potential of using clinical microsystems methodology to help build improvement capacity and capability into the everyday work of frontline staff, so that they are equipped and enabled to undertake local improvements and redesign services.

The approach is based on quality improvement thinking and methodology that not only combines tools and skills in improvement science and the practical things that can help teams make improvements, but crucially a focus on the human dynamics of change.

WHAT DID THEY DO?

The Sheffield Microsystems Coaching Academy (MCA) uses the clinical microsystems approach to enable corporate services to collaborate with clinical teams in order to achieve continuous improvement in the quality of patient care.

The MCA trains frontline staff as improvement coaches and works with teams to help them improve the quality and value of care they deliver to patients. The MCA course is five months long and coaches are expected to actively work with a microsystem team as they train.

Coaches are trained in the art of team coaching, the science of quality improvement and how to work with frontline teams to help them re-design the services they deliver.

Four cohorts of the MCA have been run so far, with 84 coaches being trained and over 107 microsystem teams having been coached. Of those coaches trained, 62% are still actively coaching.

The team also runs a two day quality improvement course. This course introduces the key concepts and thinking about quality improvement, and is primarily aimed at clinicians and managers.

The project approach required the active involvement of the microsystem team and regular weekly meetings to work on improvement, involving representatives from those who play a part in that care. Patients are at the heart of microsystem improvement, and involving patients in these microsystem improvement meetings was essential.

WHAT IMPACT DID THEY SEE?

Many teams have been able to demonstrate measurable improvements, including reductions in waiting times in outpatient settings; increased theatre productivity and efficiency; changes in quality of care resulting in open access services complementing booked services; a reduction in ‘do not attends’; and the redesign of systems to release nursing time.

In addition to specifically measured improvement, teams have reported better working relationships and many trained coaches return to their usual working environment and utilise their coaching skills and knowledge of improvement science to help support change and improvements in their own areas.

Additional training materials have been developed, such as booklets on key themes including measurement for improvement and team coaching. A quality improvement curriculum has been developed to attract other interested people from within the organisations, as well as to help and continue to engage existing coaches.

As the course has developed, the team recognised that team members as well as coaches require support and education. A one day course has therefore been established for staff who are to be part of a lead improvement group for them to learn more about the microsystem improvement approach before they start to work together.

WHAT DID THEY LEARN?

Conditions required for a successful MCA

A combination of executive leadership support, clinical credibility and quality improvement expertise has contributed to the success of building the Sheffield MCA. This support also allowed the project to be an iterative process – the team were able to test, make mistakes and develop through learning.

Conditions for successful coaching

Although the selection of the first coaches to undertake MCA training was relatively crude, it provided the project team with the opportunity to learn about who may be more successful in their coaching and therefore what attributes they should be looking for in future coaches.

It was also important to consider the range of people to train, to ensure they reflected the wider organisation. Also key was the learning that it is preferable for coaches not to coach in their own microsystem. Not only does it appear that teams find it difficult to relate to the coach as anyone other than their professional role, the coach has difficulty separating the openness and enquiring nature of coaching from that of being heavily immersed in the microsystem either operationally, managerially or clinically.

Conditions for successful microsystems

The most important learning around the microsystems work has been the conditions required for successful improvement work to happen, namely: time to meet; a leader with knowledge and enthusiasm for quality improvement; the support of a coach; a consistent method; multidisciplinary input; effective meeting skills; communication with the wider team; and the regularity of meetings and progress.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD THEY GIVE TO OTHERS?

Start small

The MCA as a concept evolved over time and was initiated after testing microsystem improvement methodology on a small scale, with a few teams and by training two individuals as team coaches. As confidence and interest grew, the logical step was to train coaches at scale to start building improvement capability within the frontline staff.

Consider your own context

Consider the habits and cultural attributes of your organisation, and the levels of will and engagement present in relation to change.

Focus first on those who are enthusiastic

Focus first efforts with teams who are enthusiastic and have a high degree of will and energy to undertake local improvements.

Consider the conditions needed for success

For successful microsystem improvement, teams need time and space to meet regularly, and they need to have effective meeting skills.

Be consistent and keep it simple

Be consistent in methodology, language and aims, and keep it simple and easy for frontline staff to understand and engage in quality improvement.

Be responsive

Be responsive in providing support and building quality improvement in teams, coaches and leaders.