

M2B7 – Case study in a downloadable format

Teleconsultation at Healthier Future Centre

The Healthier Future Centre has started preparations for the introduction of a teleconsultation service. It quickly became clear that it was first necessary to define what services would be offered through teleconsultation and who could provide teleconsultation.

An ad hoc working group was set up to define the framework for the service, based on the principles of change management. The working group consisted of four doctors, two nurses, a dietician, the in-house pharmacist, and one member each from the IT and legal departments. Mr Edwards, a chief physician in internal medicine, who has vast clinical experience but is only two years away from reaching retirement age, was appointed to lead the working group. As the institution is multi-site, the working group meetings were held online via Zoom video conferencing.

The team members had never worked together before, so the first meeting was a chance to get to know each other. Linda, the young nurse, watched the events with interest. She didn't really know why she was invited to join the team. It's true that she generally has good ideas and is also familiar with digital solutions. For example, her suggestions played a big role in the redesign of the electronic nursing record.

Several proposals have already been discussed at this meeting. One of the young doctors, Brenda, with whom the nursing staff really liked working, suggested replacing the simpler medical visits with teleconsultations. But another doctor, Adam, a middle-aged, dynamic diabetologist, interjected that it was impossible to decide which were the “simpler visits”. There was also a suggestion that teleconsultation should be carried out by nurses and should be limited mainly to the recording of administrative data on new patients and recording the part of their medical history.

The second discussion followed a similar pattern, although at Linda's suggestion, an attempt was made to collect the ideas that had been raised - without yet evaluating or deciding on them - into a list. Linda felt as if they were walking in circles in many respects. The group leader, Dr. Edwards, rarely interacted, and even then he was more interested in keeping to the schedule. She noticed that several group members turned off the camera during the discussion and only turned it on when they commented. On one occasion, the lawyer was called to answer a legal question, but did not respond, probably because he was not on the computer at the time.

The third meeting quickly turned into a debate. At the beginning of the meeting Dr Adam came up with a completely new idea. He suggested that the institution should offer dietetic advice in all 4 teleconsultation hours. His reasoning was that dietetic advice could be done well without a physical examination, that patients usually ask him a lot of questions on this subject, and that he would not devalue a visit to a doctor for a Zoom video chat. Many people liked the idea. The chief doctor, Dr Edwards nodded his head in approval, and suddenly the lawyer, who was very much relieved about the patient care regulations, turned on the camera. Dora, the head of the dieticians, was thunderstruck. Then, when it came to her, she said angrily that she thought the idea was impossible, that only two and a half dieticians were working in the institution, that teleconsultation clearly meant medical consultation to her, and that the dieticians' work,

although in a different field, required similar expertise to that of doctors. She also added that if diabetologists were more interested in nutrition science, patients would be much better cured. The discussion turned stormy and then the meeting was adjourned....

The next day Dora sat next to Linda in the dining room. She said she was ashamed of what had happened. She knows she overreacted, but she and Adam had had professional disagreements even before. Anyway, there's something to be said for the fact that dietetics lends itself to teleconsultation, she sometimes consults that way in her private practice too. But she has no idea how she would manage this with the current staff. In the end, she added that perhaps what annoys her most is that Adam brought in the proposal without consulting her first.

That afternoon Linda also received a call from Dr Edwards, the team leader. Although they had not known each other before, he noticed that she had been listening actively and felt that she had good insights. He said he would like to resolve the situation and get the team on the path to a solution. He also thought that she might be able to talk to Dora more easily than one of the doctors. He asked her to help him resolve the conflict and plan the next meeting.