

Capacity Tracker is a web-based system built by NHS North of England Commissioning Support (NECS) in partnership with NHS England, Local Authority representatives and care home providers. It enables care homes to share their vacancies in real-time, meaning hospital discharge teams and other health professionals can rapidly search availability throughout England.

I'm Diane Ashton and I'm a care home trusted assessor at Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust.

About My Role

I carry out assessments of hospital patients on behalf of care homes. I'm trusted to consider the patient's needs and evaluate which homes are able to meet those needs. Patients can often wait too long to be discharged from hospital and this can result in poorer outcomes for them. In my role I'm able to reduce delays to transfer of care and help people move from hospital to a care home of their choice efficiently.

You've been using Capacity Tracker for 18 months now, how has it helped your role?

It's cut back on admin, now it only takes me two minutes to search care homes and pick out those that are suitable for the patient. I can immediately see if the information is up-to-date and I can work with patients and families to meet their needs and provide better choices.

What were you using before Capacity Tracker?

Before Capacity Tracker I worked with someone from Care Home Support, and together we would search for care homes. Twice a week she had to call all the homes which covered both our sites and gather all of the bed data. It was mundane and very time-consuming. It would easily take up to five hours per week and wasn't an efficient use of time.

Why did you choose to implement the Capacity Tracker?

The decision was made by the CCG in Calderdale and the Trust opted into it because they felt it would be beneficial and I worked with them to implement it. I worked with a project officer and together we visited all the care homes in Kirklees to introduce them to Capacity Tracker. We demonstrated how to use it and buy-in from the start was great.

"It's made us so much more effective and efficient."

What do you especially like about Capacity Tracker?

I recently had a family whose Mum had been fast tracked to us. They were confused about what care homes were available and the type of care offered. I brought a member of the family down to the office, showed her Capacity Tracker and we were able to look through suitable care homes together. The family visited the care homes we selected and within 24 hours we were able to discharge their Mum to a home they were all happy with. It's in a patient's best interests to give them accurate information to help them make the choice that is best for them. Capacity Tracker provides a much more accurate picture of what's available. It's so easy to use, you simply type in a postcode and search radius and the results are immediate. Another big advantage is the ability to search outside of your area. Through Capacity Tracker we've helped patients and their families find care homes in Devon, the Lake District and Loughborough.

Have you got any tips for other people who are implementing Capacity Tracker?

You've got to be visible. Don't just ring the care homes, go and visit them to demonstrate it so they can immediately see what a powerful tool it is. Then keep in regular contact with them to encourage them to keep it up-to-date, preferably daily but a minimum of twice a week. Care home staff are used to ringing if they have beds available. Capacity Tracker is a much more efficient way for everyone to communicate this information but it's a different way of working and as a result can take time to become a new norm. If we can see a care home hasn't updated their information for a while, we'll get in touch with them and the CCG send our regular email reminders. Consistent communication is important for maintaining awareness of Capacity Tracker.

"Capacity Tracker takes away the confusion patients and their families often associate with finding a care home."

If you were going to tell other people about Capacity Tracker what would you say to them?

Use it, 100%. It's hard to remember what it was like before we had it. It's made us much more effective and efficient. Plus, if I'm on holiday all the other discharge staff and senior managers have access to it. This means they are not looking for a file somewhere with a written list of where beds are available.

What tasks and systems did you set up to make Capacity Tracker a success in your Trust?

Local Authority and the Trust colleagues are all co-located together in one office and this works really well. Because I'm accessible, social workers will also ask me about bed availability, and we can support each other. If I hear a relative is looking for their own care home I can go to a social worker and discuss how we can guide them. Top-ups for families can also be confusing but because social workers are here, and we've encouraged our care homes to be clear about it on Capacity Tracker, it makes it easier for us to have those conversations with families.

What's your top tip for people implementing Capacity Tracker?

Keep it open, keep it in the background, keep it on. I switch between documents throughout the day, but I always keep it open, that way I can be straight in, accessing the information I need quickly and effectively.

"Capacity Tracker helps us get the patient in the right care home, the first time."

Has Capacity Tracker helped change a person's journey through health and social care?

Certainly, the out of area search I mentioned earlier in the Lake District was very successful. We communicated on the phone, once we'd established the relationship the process was so much more efficient. For those patients that are coming to the end of their life, we want them to be able to be placed quickly, certainly within 48 hours, in a place of their choice that they are comfortable with. Some choose to die at home and others choose care homes. Once this decision is made Capacity Tracker allows me to find them a home of their choice quickly. I'd look on the system, carry out an assessment, liaise with the care home and within 24 hours the patient is usually in their chosen destination. It is comforting knowing I am able to offer this support at a time when a person needs it most.

What's been the biggest advantage to having Capacity Tracker?

If the bed data is accurate, we can do a really effective job. Family choice can cause a delay as understandably it can take them quite a bit of time to visit each home. We're able to give them a shortlist of the three that we know are appropriate and will best meet the patient's needs. In the last three weeks I've had 25 patients discharged to care homes. All except one of them were discharged to homes of their choice within 48 hours. If we didn't have Capacity Tracker it wouldn't be possible for us to work this effectively.

"It's in a patient's best interests to give them accurate information to help them make the choice that is best for them and Capacity Tracker does this."

If you no longer had access to Capacity Tracker for your job how would you feel?

It would be very difficult to do my job. I use Capacity Tracker every day now and it helps me work closely with the care homes. If I didn't have access to it, I would have a rough guide about where I could direct patients, but it would mean trawling through paper records which no longer feels like an efficient way of working and the information is probably out of date.

To find out more about Capacity Tracker visit www.necsu.nhs.uk/CapacityTracker or to request a demonstration please contact necsu.CapacityTracker@nhs.net