Supporting employee driven innovation in health care Policy Briefing

Demands on healthcare provision in England and Wales continue to rise, alongside deepening funding constraints. Government and management led measures to address this challenge have not brought about the expected efficiency gains and it is now widely recognised that the most innovative and sustainable solutions may lie with the expertise and daily practice of employees.

Our ESRC funded research project studied examples of employee led innovation to understand the conditions that facilitate and impede this (see research briefing: **http://bit.ly/IHC0606P**). In June 2016 we held a symposium for policy-makers, academics, and practitioners which focused on practical ways to encourage and support innovation across healthcare. The following policy recommendations are based on these discussions.

Policy Recommendations

Language and Culture

For some staff, the term 'innovation' is linked to top-down reform and demands for more intensive working. This can make innovation seem like something that is 'done' to them, rather than something that they might lead. To harness staff expertise for innovation there must be:

– Clear communication of a broad definition of innovation, incorporating incremental and bottom up change

– Clear communication regarding the value of all staff in driving innovation

– Clear communication that innovation is part of the job, rather than something to do before or after it

Education and Training.

Professional training programmes and workforce development provide important chances to promote and support innovation amongst a wide range of staff. These opportunities should aim to build staff capability through:

– Reflective practice to identify problems, and support the development of new ideas

– Collaborative working across professions and services to generate collective solutions

– Service evaluation and developing practical approaches to improving services

– 'User engagement' and involving patients, carers and community groups in identifying and implementing innovation

Organisation and Leadership

Senior staff and managers in NHS and health related organisations can create the conditions that support workplace innovation. Key to this is prioritising the development of workforce capacity to innovate through the way jobs are designed, work is organised and outcomes are evaluated. This can involve:

– Providing physical places and reflective spaces to enable the interactions and conversations which help stimulate ideas

– Creating a workplace research and development framework that facilitates local experimentation and evaluation

– Allowing a more creative approach to appraisals to enable conversations between staff and management that empower and recognise innovation

– Protecting time within NHS staff contracts and work plans to undertake planning and delivery of innovative projects

Funding

Overly prescriptive funding models can stifle innovation as they tend to focus on pre-defined, easily quantifiable outcomes, generating a risk averse and compliant approach. Funding can better facilitate innovation if:

– There are opportunities to pool budgets to support cross service innovation and outcomes

– It is designed to support long-term change, rather than discrete short-term projects

– It is responsive to local experience, expertise, context and priorities and does not enforce 'scaling up' and 'rolling out'

– It encourages flexibility in project 'deliverables' as the change process evolves and in light of impact on patient-care or service users

– It requires evaluation based on appropriate methodologies that promote learning by staff at all levels

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