

Sustainable Rural Health Care Networks

Rural areas in the Northern Periphery face specific challenges as regards the provision of high quality, coherent and integrated health services. These challenges manifest in the obvious geographic factors including isolation and small dispersed populations, limited public transport and road infrastructure, and the resultant, long distances to hospitals and primary health care services institutions. There are also significant difficulties in attracting and recruiting qualified and experienced personnel in rural health care services. This is compounded by the increasing centralisation of specialist secondary care services and the increase in the proportion of the elderly population relative to total population. This project will examine and pilot a number of approaches to address several different aspects of challenges to providing coherent, high quality health services to the population in the Northern Periphery. A holistic approach, focusing on patient pathways, will contribute to improved accessibility of high quality, coherent and sustainable healthcare services in remote and rural areas. The project will examine and redevelop co-operative partnerships between professions and sectors, sustainable technological solutions for clinical cooperation, and training programs to enable broader professional roles.

Objectives

The main objective of the project is to enable the actors to provide high quality, coherent healthcare services in their communities and thereby contribute to the viability of these communities. In order to do this the project will:

1. Obtain a better understanding of the social and economic environment of the northern periphery and how these impair the use of available solutions for providing high quality accessible, coherent healthcare services.
2. Improve the viability of healthcare service delivery in the northern periphery by:
 - a. Developing new models for clinical evaluation
 - b. Empowering patients to take control of their health and health care and hence influencing how service is delivered
 - c. Tailoring models for professional education and further training
 - d. Reduce unnecessary hospital admission
 - e. Maximising the potential of health care teams/professionals
 - f. Reducing transportation costs connected to clinical care, professional training and development
 - g. By developing more effective practices

3. Improve the quality of services by:
 - a. Improving patient flow
 - b. Training staff for the roles they have to fill given the geographical and demographical context
 - c. Developing joined up approaches for specific patient groups via patient pathways of care

Project activities

The project uses a holistic/single system approach, focused on establishing cooperative service networks within and across the healthcare system by; tailoring of educational and further training modules, utilising technological solutions currently available to improve cooperation between actors and service providers, and critically for continued professional development and increasing the role and influence of the patient in focusing the service on their needs within remote and rural areas. To this end, three discrete but integrated work packages have been identified for the project:

1. Focus patient pathways: The need for innovative co-operative partnerships
2. Sustainable systems for training and upgrading of professional skills in remote and rural areas
3. The impact and sustainability of e-health solutions in remote and rural areas

Expected results

The tools developed in the project will be used to enable the participating regions to provide high quality, coherent and sustainable services, regardless of the natural handicaps presented by their NPP location. Utilising total capacity of the health care system in the northern periphery is vital to respond to the demands of healthcare services and thus support the viability of small, remote and often isolated rural communities. The project will also contribute to an increase in the level of both professional and patient satisfaction. Their satisfaction will increase within a healthcare system that is sustainable, particularly given the specific geographical and demographical challenges faced in the northern periphery.

Partners

AKMC, Centre for Emergency and Disaster Medicine - Sweden
UHI Millennium Institute: Morey College & Lews Castle - Scotland
NHS (National Health Services) Western Isles - Scotland
NHS Argyle and Clyde - Scotland
National Centre for Telemedicine - Norway
Tromsø University College, Department of Health - Norway
Regional Development Centre of Mid-Troms - Norway
Kemi-Tornio Polytechnic - Finland

Measure

3.1

Total Budget

1 177 808

NPP Award

458 943

Project Period

01/06/2005 – 01/09/2007

Countries Involved

Norway, Scotland, Finland, Sweden

Lead Partner

Organisation

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