“Embrace technology to benefit staff and, ultimately, patients”

With the pace of technological developments ever increasing and people becoming more aware of the possibilities this offers, there is greater expectation and demand from patients for us to use technology to deliver higher standards of care and support.

When we think about the use of technology in our environment, we still often think about it in the context of clinical delivery. However, equally important to achieving improved service delivery is the growth of virtual networks, remote working, use of media, communication channels and cross-organisational partnership working.

New media in particular offer opportunities and challenges we must all embrace. With more and more resources made available online, use of websites, YouTube, webinars, Twitter, online tools and Skype to mention just a few, is growing rapidly. We can reach a wider audience, do so faster and in an ever-increasing number of ways. It often feels like we just can’t keep up!

We must be courageous and look at how our organisations can create an environment where staff at all levels can make full use of the resources available. There is still a real challenge for us in creating the right environment so we can unlock this rich resource for our workforce and, as a result, benefit the people we care for and support.

Since Compassion in Practice was launched last December, we have looked at ways of raising awareness and engagement in implementing the 6Cs. The development of 6Cs Live! has proven extremely successful so far and has the potential to provide individuals and organisations with a range of ways to engage, and share experiences and good practice.

Use of Twitter and other social media has also become a highly effective way of connecting people, disseminating information quickly, promoting events and provoking some fantastic multidisciplinary discussions. As a result of this we are starting to see pockets of real mobilisation and activity – but there is more we can do, more people we can engage and a greater impact we can have. We are already beginning to see some fantastic examples of how social media have motivated and supported individuals and teams to do great things, enabled by technology and the ability to connect with people in real time.

My challenge is to ask every executive board in every healthcare organisation to think about whether their policies and systems are fit for purpose to take them into this technological age – without compromising data security or enabling the improper use of resources.

Be courageous and trust your people. Embrace, encourage, enable and empower them to access all that technology offers to help them develop their skills, knowledge and networks. Use these to create a truly great working environment and even greater outcomes and experiences for your patients. Once you achieve this, the creativity that will flow within your organisation will provide you with a rich, invaluable resource. NT

Jane Cummings is chief nursing officer, NHS England

I have a little experience of caring for a family member with mental health problems. Mercifully, the problems, although distressing, were neither serious nor long lasting.

This experience gave me some insight into the difficulties of the caring role – you are responsible for keeping your loved one safe and are absolutely untrained for this. Every word must be scrutinised before being spoken, to avoid inadvertently causing distress.

I was left full of admiration for those who care for people with serious, enduring problems. These carers need practical and emotional support, yet are often overlooked by services.

Our innovation (page 22) reports on a project to develop peer support workshops for carers. Carers save society huge amounts of money. Surely we owe it to them to provide support to them in this invaluable and challenging role?

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