



# The lean pathway to transforming patient care

## Dramatic success in just 20 weeks

As a radical response to meeting the government's 18-week maximum waiting target, NHS South Central Strategic Health Authority established a Transforming Care programme to apply Lean principles and redesign patient pathways. Working with Atos Consulting, the consulting practice of Atos Healthcare, the authority has reduced waiting times by an average of 14 weeks, and, in some cases, by 25 weeks. These dramatic reductions have been achieved by implementing Lean across 27 individual patient pathways in just 20 weeks.

“Transforming Care was in many ways a step into the unknown. Its success is a testament to all involved at South Central, and to Atos Consulting, who brought expertise, professionalism, dedication and flexibility to the task. This is not something that would have happened without their input.”

**Steve Fairman, Head of Service Improvement, NHS South Central**

### **NHS South Central**

NHS South Central serves around four million people across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

It comprises nine primary care trusts, nine acute trusts, three mental health trusts, one learning disability trust, one specialist trust and one ambulance trust.

While South Central was an early adopter of the 2004 NHS Improvement Plan to achieve a maximum 18-week waiting period, by 2007 the authority felt it needed a radical solution that could deliver both broad and targeted improvements in numerous patient pathways if it was to achieve that goal.

### **The challenge**

Prior to the Lean programme at NHS South Central, NHS organisations had successfully run week-long Rapid Improvement Events to tackle and solve specific issues, but implementing Lean on the scale required now had never been contemplated before.

NHS South Central asked us to work with its nine primary care trusts to deliver:

- » An NHS South Central Academy – a repository of service improvement tools and techniques
- » 27 redesigned patient pathways – three high-priority pathways in each community with high waiting times or particular challenges
- » The transfer of skills and knowledge to NHS staff – to develop a network of experts to drive improvements and maintain momentum over time
- » A Knowledge Management Framework – networks of experts to support sustainability, plus an electronic tool to capture specific deliverables for sharing.

The redesigning and implementation of each new patient pathway required engaging up to 30 managers and clinicians (consultants, physiotherapists, nurses and theatre staff) in a collaborative, consensual but nevertheless robust approach to ensure delivery timescales and consistent quality improvements were achieved across all the pathways. The geographical area to be covered stretched from Southampton to Milton Keynes.

All Lean activity would naturally be conducted while ‘business-as-usual’ carried on across all nine primary care trusts. And there was an extremely demanding delivery schedule, as projects would be initiated, negotiated, implemented and tested-in-service simultaneously for an enormous range of patient pathways.

### **Our solution**

First of all, we appointed a dedicated project director to oversee and coordinate the 27 projects, with multi-skilled teams based in each of the nine communities. We established a pattern of senior representation, with our engagement partner attending monthly meetings of the 27 chief executives of NHS South Central. And our team began work with 10 chief executives and hundreds of NHS South Central staff.

With our engagement structure in place, we then set about helping clinicians and managers to understand why Lean, and the approach being taken – to improve all 27 patient pathways at the same time – was the right way forward. There was scepticism, debate, dispute and argument on the way to consensus – which is exactly how it should be, because intelligent professionals have a right to their opinion when they are being asked to buy in to fundamental change and the sheer amount of extra work and effort it takes – and then believe in the benefits before they experience them. But collectively, we got there, because Lean demands, promotes and supports absolute honesty.

### **Evidence, please**

At the same time, we developed the first-ever blueprint of the processes for each patient pathway, across the Strategic Health Authority. As Lean is rigorously evidence-based, the pathway performance evidence we collected was particularly important in convincing clinicians of Lean’s value. At the end of each phase we also conducted an ‘outbrief’ to validate the work with everyone involved.

Ultimately, all the work was being undertaken on behalf of patients. So we constantly refocused pathway redesign around their needs and concerns. For example, pathways could have been configured to be even faster, but in some instances this was not in the best interests of patients (who may want time to prepare practically and emotionally for surgery).

## Eight steps to success

The team designed a 20-week, eight-step process in accordance with Lean principles, for each pathway. The purpose of this approach to process improvement was to ensure that each pathway delivers value at every stage to every NHS South Central patient. For that to be achieved, all constraints to smooth flowing process, and all waste, at every point in the process, must be removed. That is what patient pathway redesign sets out to achieve, using Lean. And for Lean, waste is defined as any activity that takes time, money and effort without adding any value for the patient. The first five Lean steps therefore focused on end-to-end Value Stream Redesign:

1. Prepare for value stream analysis (VSA)
2. Current state analysis
3. Identify constraints
4. Next future state design
5. Implementation plan

The sixth stage was all about delivering quick wins:

6. Lean action weeks (also known as Rapid Improvement Events or Kaizen Events)

Stages seven and eight built sustainability and embedded changes in NHS South Central's organisational structure, roles and processes, to make them stick.

7. Cross-cutting and enabling projects
8. Create the continuous improvement environment

An equally important aspect of sustainability was our work with a team of matched NHS resources. Over 200 NHS staff were seconded and formally trained in Lean in a classroom setting, and then coached on the programme of work. We thereby supported NHS staff to apply Lean process transformational approaches to all 27 pathways. And staff trained by us will redesign the remaining pathways across NHS South Central.

## The benefits

Our work with NHS South Central met all four objectives for Transforming Care, delivering solid and measurable pathway performance benefits:

- » Waiting times have been reduced across 24 different pathways and nine health communities
- » The average reduction is 14 weeks per pathway. In some pathways, there was a reduction of 25 weeks, representing a 50% cut
- » At Southampton Accident & Emergency Department, 98% of patients are now treated within four hours
- » In Milton Keynes, waiting times for GP appointments have been reduced. In one practice, 100% of patients can now expect to consult with their GP the same or next day.

Additional benefits include:

- » More time spent with patients (for example 900 hours of clinical time released on one pathway)
- » Fewer hospital visits needed by patients (for example 30% in Buckinghamshire)
- » A 50% reduction in the number of patients failing to attend appointments, resulting from better-planned care, and which reduces disruption to clinicians' schedules.



Winners of the Operational Performance and Best Public Sector Award at the 2009 MCA Management Awards for dramatically cutting waiting times for NHS South Central patients.

### **Forward into the future**

Our work with NHS South Central is a classic demonstration of the fact that Lean is a process of improvement, not an end in itself. The individual benefits Lean working achieves – such as the benefits delivered to NHS South Central – are of course a reason in their own right to adopt Lean. But the long-term benefits lie in the understanding, knowledge, skills, training, coaching and mentoring that each improved patient pathway represents.

So finally, the satisfaction of bringing Lean working to an organisation such as NHS South Central, comes when the clinicians, managers, and senior executives know they now have what they need to collectively move forward with confidence and commitment into the future.

### **Next steps**

If you would like more information about Atos Healthcare's Lean solutions and experience, please call 020 7830 4931 or visit [atoshealthcare.com](http://atoshealthcare.com)

### **About Atos Healthcare**

Atos Healthcare, a division of Atos Origin, combines the Company's expertise in consulting, technology and healthcare to improve the way care is delivered. Services range from lean service transformation, commissioning, hosting and software development, through to disability assessments, occupational health and front line primary care. Atos Healthcare has a team of more than 3000, of whom around two-thirds are qualified medical professionals.

### **About Atos Origin**

Atos Origin is an international information technology services company. Its business is turning client vision into results through the application of Consulting, Systems Integration and Managed Operations. The Company's annual revenue is EUR 5.5 billion and it employs 50,000 professionals in 40 countries. Atos Origin is the Worldwide Information Technology Partner for the Olympic Games and has a client base of international blue-chip companies across all sectors. Atos Origin is quoted on the Paris Eurolist Market and trades as Atos Origin, Atos Worldline and Atos Consulting.

### **About Atos Consulting™**

Atos Consulting™, the global consulting practice of Atos Origin, is a leading provider of business, process and technology consulting services. With more than 2,500 staff globally, it focuses on delivering proven, pragmatic solutions to the telecom, manufacturing, financial services and public sectors.