A VIEW FROM CLINICAL NURSE ADVISORS

There is more pressure than ever for NHS trusts to generate savings. But to be successful, the procurement process must go beyond saving money and focus on clinical suitability, quality, and patient safety. It therefore requires real partnership between procurement teams and clinicians. Here, we look at that very developing partnership with NHS Supply Chain.

Established in April 2018, the Clinical and Product Assurance team within NHS Supply Chain (NHSSC) ensures that the all products procured by NHSSC are value for money, fit for purpose, safe, and reflect professional, patient, and carer needs. A team of clinical nurse advisors supports the operational delivery of this at a local level within the customer engagement team.

Their clinical background, combined with their understanding of the procurement process, makes them ideally suited to bring procurement and clinical agendas together. The advisors understand the importance of value for money while ensuring product usability and clinical suitability. In this issue, we get some insight into the challenges and motivations from four of NHS Supply Chain’s clinical nurse advisors: Emma Nuttall (EN), Alison White (AW), Katriona Graham (KG), and Michelle Knowles (MK).

What are your main responsibilities?

EN: Working alongside trust staff, both within clinical teams and in trust procurement departments, I identify ways to facilitate savings and product standardisation whilst maintaining safety and quality for the patients and product users. We are integral to the customer engagement team by being a clinically credible voice and giving expert advice through the sharing of knowledge and experience.

AW: I provide a clinical voice within trust procurement departments and the wider business, helping them to understand potential clinical barriers and reach a satisfactory conclusion for all.

Why did you become a clinical nurse advisor?

EN: I developed an interest in product choice and purchasing whilst working within theatres. This started while I was a staff nurse and then a sister, but increased as a department manager with budget responsibility and savings targets to achieve. I wanted a role which allowed me to work across a more diverse procurement and NHS landscape whilst supporting staff to do a great job for their patients, but also to make sound product and purchasing choices.

KG: Having worked both in the NHS and the private sector, I felt this was an opportunity to use these experiences to work with trusts on the changing landscape within procurement, supporting impartiality on prod-
The Clinical and Product Assurance (CaPA) function within NHS Supply Chain ensures that all products procured for the health and care system are of value for money, fit for purpose, safe, and reflect professional, patient, and carer needs. The CaPA team consistently apply the recent assurance framework across the Category Tower Service Providers to ensure professionals, patients, and carers support the development of future specifications and associated evaluations to meet user needs as part of the procurement process.

CaPA also ensures that the procurement process is informed by the patient safety agenda in collaboration with partners such as NHS Improvement and NHS England. CaPA supports the adoption of new innovations into the NHS which provide improvements in patient outcomes, sustainability and/or unmet clinical need. This is informed by collaboration with wider national initiatives including the National Wound Care Strategy Programme, Excellence in Continence Care, Health Tech Connect, and NICE to ensure procurement supports the delivery of the NHS Long-Term Plan.

Products while facilitating clinician choice.

**What do you love about your job?**

**EN:** Seeing hard work pay off. Being able to change a person’s perception of procurement and NHSSC is hugely rewarding. Getting clinical staff to work with their procurement teams and become involved in the process of product choice to make savings targets and for them also to win nationally recognised awards for projects I have supported them with.

**KG:** Customer and colleagues’ understanding of the clinical nurse advisor role can be varied, and managing expectations around projects adds to the challenge. We cover many trusts, so this in itself is also challenging, but rewarding.

**MK:** Believe in yourself and your capabilities.

**AW:** Being invited to join the south of England clinical procurement group, showing that my work is appreciated and valued.

**KG:** Using my previous work experiences and knowledge to develop relationships with clinicians to move forward on projects they feel they have control over, in terms of clinician choice and potential savings.

**MK:** Being seen as a valuable member of team NHS.

**What is the most challenging aspect of your job?**

**EN:** There aren’t enough hours in the day to do all the things I would like to do, as quickly as I would like to do them. The everchanging procurement and product landscape throws up challenges and hurdles, but then again that makes the job interesting.

**KG:** The opportunity to make a difference and help trusts achieve cost-effective, safe clinical choices – plus I’m constantly learning about new things every day! Working with a great team of nurses that I can turn to if I need help in understanding products or want to bounce ideas off.

**MK:** Developing good relationships in trusts where previously they have not worked collaboratively with NHSSC.

**What career advice would you give to your younger self?**

**EN:** If you are going to think big, think bigger. Nothing is impossible.

**KG:** If you are going to think big, think bigger. Impossible is nothing.

**AW:** You get back what you put in and if you’re going to do a job, do it well or not at all!

**KG:** Grasp every opportunity and learn from it. Not everything works out but experience is invaluable.