

The NHS Procurement eEnablement Programme – Using information to deliver better healthcare

ABSTRACT

Common standards hold the key to unlocking the benefits of procurement eEnablement in the NHS. This article describes the importance of information in the healthcare supply network and provides an overview of the NHS Procurement eEnablement Programme.



Article by **Rachel Hodson-Gibbons**

Healthcare and information

Healthcare is an information intensive environment and the availability of quality information is essential for the delivery of safe and effective healthcare services. Decisions based on poor quality information provide ineffective healthcare services which adversely affect the outcome of treatment for patients and provide the NHS with a significant and avoidable cost.

The healthcare service in the UK is provided by a large number of organisations involving the private sector, the NHS and an increasing use of the retail sector. An equally large number of suppliers of goods and services supply into this network of healthcare providers. Purchasing and supply is essentially about relationships between organisations and processes; more effective processes and better relationships provide a higher quality supply chain.

To achieve stronger and effective processes and relationships, within and between organisations access to high quality information is required. To enable the effective delivery of high quality information organisations on the buy and supply sides of the healthcare network must be able to share data and order to achieve this common data standards are required.

Current NHS position

The NHS has adopted a fragmented approach to the management of procurement and commercial information and systems and consequently the lack of common data standards has created many data silos. Data is available in very large volumes however quality information is in short supply.

An example from the English NHS illustrates this point well. Figure 1 provides an extract from the NHS Purchasing and Supply's Agency's pharmacy database which collates details of orders placed by NHS Trusts. The database contains 130 different descriptions, 30 of which are shown in figure 1, of a single product, Bleomycin 15,000 unit powder solution for injection vials.

The lack of a common commercial and procurement data standards in the NHS means that the analysis of expenditure and demand requirements across organisations is very costly in terms of time and resources. Without standards to accurately identify products and suppliers the accuracy can never be certain and visibility across the NHS is limited.

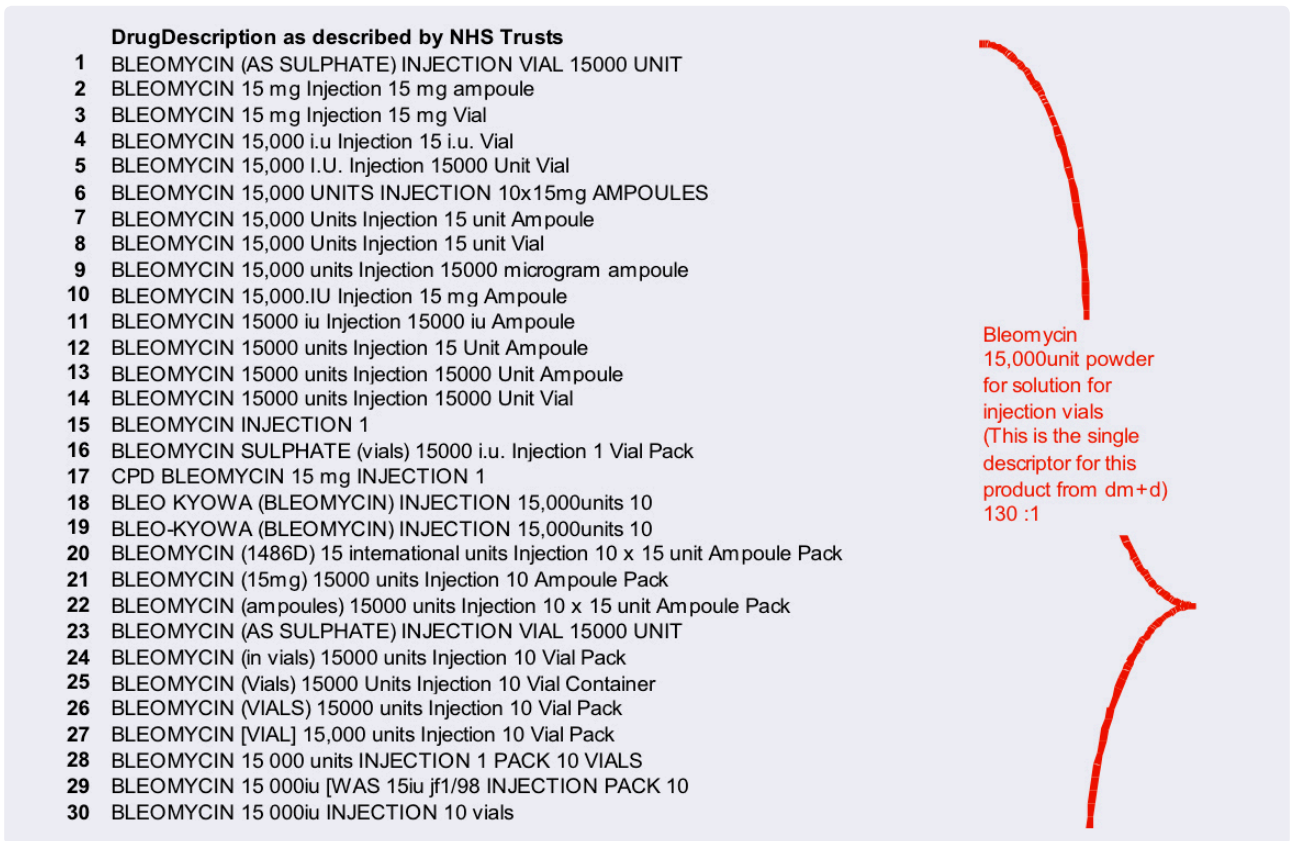
Effective information is the key foundation to an effective supply chain and effective healthcare.

Processes and data standards

The implementation of common data standards across the procurement and commercial systems by NHS organisations and its suppliers also enables information to be easily transferred between systems. This enables interoperability between systems, allowing automation which reduces the resources required, removes errors, increases compliance and reduces risk.

Beyond the business benefits the implementation of common procurement data standards enables traceability and this directly contributes to improvements in patient safety. This was demonstrated in *Coding for Success – simple technology for safer patient care*, a Department of Health policy document published in February 2007.

Figure 1

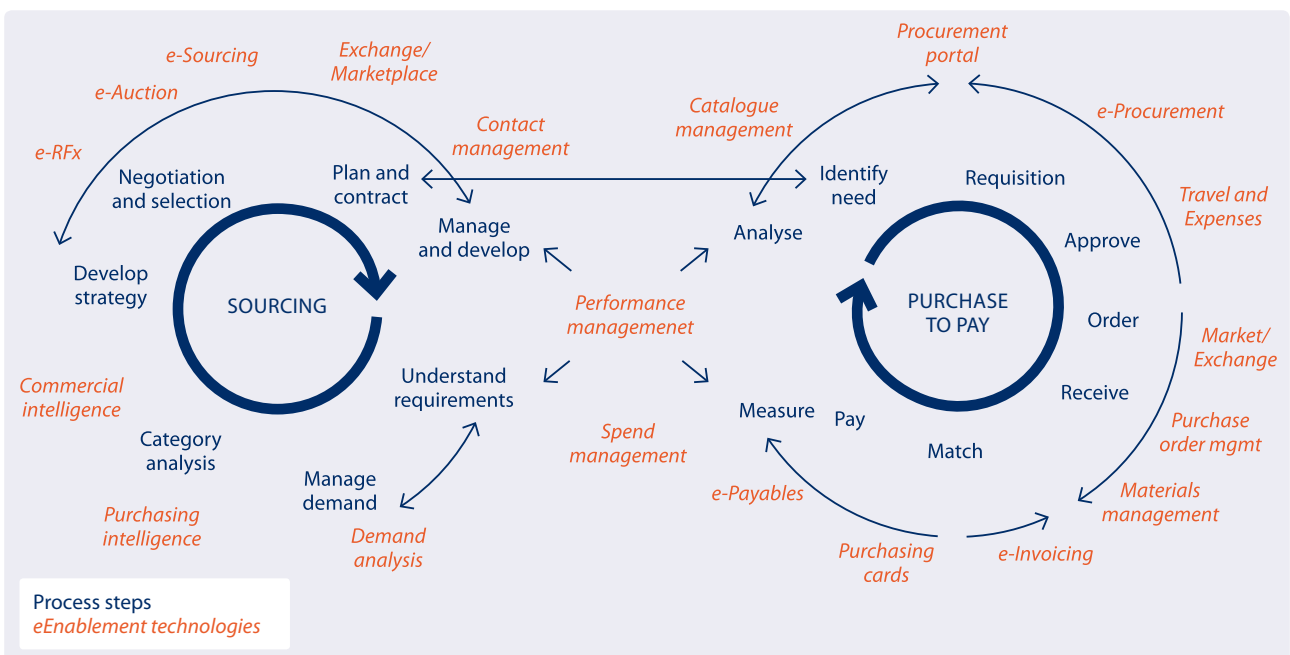


Procurement eEnablement technologies

Procurement eEnablement is the application of information and communication technologies to the commercial and procurement functions. Figure 2 provides an overview

of this activity; the text inside the arrows describes the processes undertaken and the text outside the arrows describes the eEnablement technologies.

Figure 2



Procurement eEnablement technologies are important to the NHS as to be effective they demand common data standards across the NHS organisations and their suppliers. Implemented procurement eEnablement technologies provide the NHS with an important opportunity to significantly enhance its capability to manage procurement information, improve its commercial and procurement processes and remove waste and duplication.

Procurement eEnablement and the NHS

Though the NHS has been using procurement eEnablement technologies since the early 1990's the approach to the implementation of these has been fragmented. Consequently the NHS has a wide range of standards in use and therefore limited interoperability between systems and little visibility of its expenditure across the network. The NHS has also failed to exploit sensible once-only opportunities that procurement eEnablement technologies offer; such as the management of product data for electronic catalogues and pre-qualification.

NHS Procurement eEnablement Programme

The NHS procurement eEnablement Programme (NPEP) is about providing the NHS with the capability to effectively use procurement eEnablement technologies and achieve the significant benefits that are available. The programme implements the strategy *Procurement eEnablement in the NHS, June 2007*.

At the core of the programme is the implementation of common data standards for procurement and commercial processes.

The programme has four key outputs, described in Figure 3.

The outputs of the programme are delivered through a range of projects which have two levels of delivery:

- **Level 1 projects** establish common data and business message standards for commercial and procurement systems; provide a library of knowledge and guidance in conjunction with a range of tools for the NHS to improve awareness and understanding.
- **Level 2 projects** drive the delivery of procurement eEnablement capability into the NHS by directly providing resources to work directly with NHS organisations, suppliers and technology providers to achieve the following:
 - The capability for all procurement eEnablement systems in the NHS market to support NHS standards and interoperability requirements.
 - The capability within NHS organisations to make appropriate use of procurement eEnablement technologies.
 - The capability within the NHS to co-ordinate investment in procurement eEnablement technologies.
 - A transfer of skills and knowledge into NHS organisations to establish a mature understanding of procurement eEnablement by NHS organisations.
 - To implement a once-only approach to the provision of product and pre-qualification data.

The NPEP projects were developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders from NHS organisations, suppliers of goods and services and technology providers. The NHS Procurement eEnablement Programme is focused on delivering pragmatic steps that put into place the key enablers required for the effective implementation of procurement eEnablement technologies in the NHS and drive forward the adoption of these technologies.

Figure 3: NHS Procurement eEnablement Programme

DIRECTION	To provide a clear direction for the NHS, its suppliers and technology providers on the requirements for NHS procurement eEnablement. Through the provision of a strategy and then a model that describes the capability requirements.
AWARENES AND UNDERSTANDING	To put into place a strong awareness and understanding in the NHS of the benefits available from procurement eEnablement, the current position of the NHS and the actions that are required to enable the significant benefits.
NHS STANDARDS	To establish NHS data and business message standards and requirements for interoperability between procurement eEnablement systems and provide guidance.
NHS CAPABILITY	To significantly improve the capability of the NHS to effectively implement and utilise procurement eEnablement technologies.

The level 1 projects are funded by the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency and work on these commenced in mid 2008/09. The level 2 projects will be run over a three year period and require significant additional funding for which a business case has been presented to the Department of Health (October 2008).

NHS Procurement data standards

The key building blocks of common data standards for NHS commercial and procurement processes are coding systems that enable the unique identification of suppliers and products and a classification system to enable the analysis of expenditure. The NHS standards are:

Supplier codes



Duns numbers from Dunn & Bradstreet are the NHS standards for supplier codes. Duns numbers are available free of charge for all legal entities. The NPEP programme has provided a web portal to enable suppliers and the NHS to identify Duns numbers.

Product and location codes



GS1 GTINs (Global Trade Item Numbers) are the NHS standard for products and GLNs for the identification of locations.

REFERENCES

- Coding for Success – simple technology for safer patient care, Department of Health, February 2007
- Procurement eEnablement in the NHS, NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, June 2007

AUTHOR

Rachel Hodson-Gibbons is a purchasing and supply professional and currently holds the post of Head of eProcurement for the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency in which she is leading the NHS Procurement eEnablement Program. Rachel's most recent posts have been Category

Classification

NHS-eClass

The NHS standard for classification is NHS-eClass. This classification system is owned by the NHS and is mapped to several other classification systems to ensure that NHS-eClass can provide an effective analysis of expenditure.

NHS Procurement eEnablement Delivery Group

The NHS Procurement eEnablement Programme is owned by the NHS Procurement eEnablement Delivery Group (NPEDG), the NHS stakeholder group for procurement eEnablement, which was formed in late 2006. Membership of NPEDG is drawn from organisations across the NHS and includes representatives from the home countries. The current Chair of the group is Chris Slater, Head of Supplies from Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust.

In June 2007 NPEDG published a strategy for procurement eEnablement in the NHS within ministerial sponsorship and the NHS Procurement eEnablement Programme implements this.

For further information visit www.pasa.nhs.uk or contact eenablement@nhs.net.