People Connect and Communities of Practice

Iona Waterston
Knowledge Services
NHS Education for Scotland
2 Central Quay
89 Hydepark Street
Glasgow G3 8BW

Annette Thain
Knowledge Services
NHS Education for Scotland
2 Central Quay
89 Hydepark Street Glasgow
G3 8BW
annette.thain@nes.scot.nhs.uk

Katie Edwards
Knowledge Services
NHS Education for Scotland
2 Central Quay
89 Hydepark Street Glasgow G3
8BW
katie.edwards@nes.scot.nhs.uk

We describe People Connect and Community websites, tools available to all health and social care staff in through 'The Knowledge Network'. Using People Connect and Community websites both as separate digital entities or using them together, staff can build relationships and communities with practitioners from health, social services in local authorities, independent and voluntary sectors. To show how People Connect can be used in conjunction with community websites to enable Communities of Practice to support and improve the integration between health and social care staff, we conducted an analysis of current usage of People Connect with Communities of Practice and how they support staff from health and social care to share ideas and work together to solve problems.

Communities, integration, digital tools, information sharing, Outcomes.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of a community of practice (CoP) was first defined and described as: *"a group of people who engage in collective learning in a common area of interest"* [1].

Recent research has emphasised the idea that a CoP is defined by a group of people who 'Think Together' [2].

In CoPs people come together to share experiences, learn about a topic and solve problems, so people should always be at the centre.

They can be online or face to face, but preferably both as this allows trust to develop.

Unlike teams in the workplace, they are not formally managed, but do require time and effort to cultivate, engage members and make them effective.

2. PEOPLE CONNECT AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

2.1 People Connect

People Connect is a social directory and social networking website developed by NHS Education for Scotland (NES)[1] for all health and social care staff with NHS Scotland 'OpenAthens' usernames[2].

Staff can use this tool to create a professional profile online. It's then possible to find colleagues and to build relationships with all health and care staff, as well as connect with communities and expand the reach of your networks.

The discussion and group functionality enables online discussion to support communities or other projects. It is also possible to join a mentoring scheme through People Connect which links mentors and mentees and gives them an online space to communicate.

People Connect was developed by NES for three reasons:

---

[1] http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/

[2] http://openathens.org/about-us/

1. *To provide accessible discussion functionality to support the Communities of Practice on The Knowledge Network, as the existing discussion space was no longer fit for purpose.*

2. *To overcome access issues experienced by NHS and local authority staff when attempting to use other social media tools for professional development.*

3. *To provide a safe environment for those staff who are new to social media, as it is only accessible to those with an NHS Scotland OpenAthens username.*

2.2 Online Communities of Practice on The Knowledge Network[3]

Community websites provide virtual spaces for Communities of Practice which people can join to participate in an online community around a certain topic or theme, such as Acute Care or Dementia[4].

Using community websites, members can share information and resources; promote events, conference and training; contact other members, join in discussions and share good practice.

The NES Community Builder Toolkit [3] enables cross sectoral working by making it easier to create an online community of practice to focus on a particular topic or area of practice, taking advantage of benefits of technology and online spaces to add a whole other dynamic to your community.

2.3 Supporting integration

Using People Connect and Community websites ─ together or as separate digital entities ─ staff can build relationships and communities with practitioners from health, social services in local authorities, independent and voluntary sectors.

Communities of Practice therefore allow relationships to be built across sectors more easily. In addition, they break through hierarchies: everyone is equal in the community as they all have something to contribute. Therefore, the principles of communities of practice support cross boundary working and this is further supported by the accessibility of the tools to anyone with an NHS Scotland OpenAthens username.

However, it is important to remember that technology is the tool, not the driver.

In order to be successful, communities of practice should be driven by the people who are a part of them.

3. PLATFORM DESCRIPTION

The methodology employed will be an analysis of current usage of People Connect with Communities of Practice. Analysis of current usage included profile, subject tag and group creation on People Connect and an analysis of Community of Practice websites.

Currently there are 1,989 profiles which have been created on People Connect.

Using one's professional profile, users can add a photo, information about themselves, their careers and experiences and contact details. They can also add subject interest tags as well as publications. Users can also add their social media accounts and a Twitter Feed. Creating an interesting professional profile will encourage other members to contact specific users.

Specific Communities of Practice can be found on People Connect by using the Search functionality and Subject Tags; for example, as a 'People Connect user interested in Dementia'.

After using the search on People Connect with the search term 'Dementia', the following related Communities of Practice are returned in the search: *'Dementia MKN, Dementia Champions, Palliative and end of life care in Dementia'.* Similarly, if the user clicks on a subject tag, then Communities of Practice related to the subject area are returned on the web page.

Currently there are 11 Groups on People Connect. Groups in People Connect enable health and social care professionals to create private or open groups to create discussions, contact other members, network with each other, post questions, share resources and information including good practice and post information on events and conferences.

The Knowledge Network now hosts over 100 online communities of practice which uses the Community Builder Toolkit to develop community websites.

Community of Practice websites support a range of practice areas and topics including:

- Quality improvement initiatives
- Clinical practice and networks
- Professional groups

---

[3] http://www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/home.aspx

[4] http://www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/developandsupportcommunities/about-communities-of-practice.aspx

4. PLATFORM USAGE

Currently users can use People Connect and Communities of Practice together in the following ways:

- There is one single professional profile for both Communities of Practice and People Connect which is created in People Connect

- Use the search and subject tags on People Connect to find related Communities of Practice

- Increase Community of Practice membership by searching for people on People Connect interested in a topic area and emailing them

- Encourage Community of Practice members to join People Connect

- Create a discussion on People Connect and post the URL on the Community website

- Use the People Connect Group functionality to create a Community of Practice

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Demo People Connect to the new partnerships for health and social care integration

- Build a mailing list of key staff involved in health and social care integration

- Use social media using the hashtag **#peopleconnectscot** to increase the awareness of People Connect to staff involved in health and social care integration

- Create a network of People Connect champions which include staff working in health and social care integration

6. CONCLUSIONS

People Connect and Communities of Practice when used together support staff from health and social care to share ideas and work together to solve problems.

People Connect is available here:

www.peopleconnect.scot.nhs.uk.

Communities of Practice are available on The Knowledge Network:

www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/home/communities .

To find out more about joining these resources, you can e-mail: knowledge@nes.scot.nhs.uk

7. REFERENCES

[1] Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning and identity. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

[2] Thinking together: What makes Communities of Practice work? Pyrko, Igor; Dörfler, Viktor; Eden, Colin, Human Relations 2016.

http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00187 26716661040

[3] NES Community Builder Toolkit

http://www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/developandsupp ortcommunities/about-communities-of-practice.aspx