

South 4 Pathology Partnership picks CliniSys to support its collaborative approach to networking

Labs at four trusts in Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, and Swindon will use WinPath Enterprise to deliver a consistent, high quality and equitable service and build a platform for innovation

One of England's new pathology networks has picked the CliniSys WinPath Enterprise laboratory information management system (LIMS) to support joined-up working and build a common IT platform for innovation.

The South 4 Pathology Partnership, which was formed in 2018 and covers Buckinghamshire Healthcare, Milton Keynes University Hospital, Oxford University Hospitals, and Great Western Hospitals NHS trusts, plans to use the single LIMS to help deliver an integrated, consistent, and high quality service across all network sites.

Once the LIMS is in place, it will also support the network's program of innovation, making sure all trusts, clinicians and patients are able to take advantage of new technology, such as digital pathology and machine learning.

Ian Ward, a transformation programme director at Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, said: "The history of networks goes back to the Carter Report, which recommended that pathology services needed to consolidate to achieve economies of scale.

"The Carter Report focused on efficiency, but we also wanted to make sure there is equity across the patch, so users get the same quality service wherever they are.

"It was evident from other pathology networks across England that to achieve that aim, we would need a fully integrated, interoperable system, which is why moving to WinPath Enterprise is so important for us."

To take forward the recommendations of the Carter Report, NHS England mandated the creation of 29 pathology networks, of which the South 4 Pathology Partnership is one. The original proposal comprised just three trusts, but longstanding clinical relationships with Milton Keynes University Hospital meant its inclusion had clear patient and service benefits, and the revised configuration was approved by NHS England.

Derek Roskell, clinical lead for the South 4 Pathology Partnership, and a consultant pathologist at Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, said: "We have taken the network concept in a different direction.

"The Carter vision of hub and spokes is usually interpreted as one big lab and lots of small ones, but our requirement modifies this a little. We recognise that while physical consolidation is important for some parts of the service, an integrated LIMS, digital histopathology, common equipment and shared procurement can deliver many of the Carter benefits through a virtual consolidation.

“We want key pathology services in Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes, and Swindon close to their clinicians, but working as part of a joined up service across the network. This model needs to be flexible and able to respond to new challenges.

“The Covid-19 pandemic showed the importance of this way of thinking. When it arrived, hospitals needed a lot of tests conducted very fast. The LIMS will support an organic model that can respond to changes of this kind. Results will be shared across the network, so they are available to clinicians wherever our patients are treated.”

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the procurement process for a new LIMS, because it has unlocked central funding for technology to help services respond to the crisis and build in resilience for the future.

The process of building the new system to support the exact requirements of the network will start in Oxford, which currently has a mix of systems delivered by multiple suppliers and some solutions created in-house. Once Oxford is live, there will be a phased deployment to the other trusts in the network.

They already use IT from CliniSys, but their systems are older and less connected than WinPath Enterprise, which was built to meet the needs of pathology networks. CliniSys will host the new system, so the network does not have to worry about security, maintenance and updates.

Sarah Davis, lab director at Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in Swindon, said: “As a laboratory service based at a district general hospital, we want to do the best for our patients and to be innovative, but it can be a challenge to find the staff, funding and expertise.

“By joining a network, we can have the best of both worlds. We can have our pathologists working very closely alongside their clinical colleagues, we can call-in support when we need it, and we can access innovation, such as digital pathology and AI.

“Many of our patients are also referred to Oxford, so being part of a network that uses a single IT system will help them, because their results will be available wherever they are treated.”

The South 4 partnership is also keen to adopt innovations such as digital pathology, which turns the traditional glass slide into a digital image that can be viewed on a computer screen or mobile device, and machine learning, which can be used to improve workflow and help clinicians interpret results.

Jude Craft, programme lead for the South 4 partnership, said: “Covid-19 showed the network in its best light; there was a high level of collaboration between the trusts which helped to deal with the challenges facing pathology services throughout the pandemic. Now, we want to take that same collaborative spirit and run with it.

“Deploying WinPath Enterprise will be an important step for us, but we also want to innovate, and to bring in networked digital pathology and the use of AI tools. So, we are looking to bring CliniSys into our partnership. We want them to support us and to complement our path for innovation. We want the LIMS to provide the platform for future development.”

Jill Beech, pathology services manager at Milton Keynes University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, agreed: “To build a sustainable future we need a system that will be as responsive,

adaptable and resilient as our workforce has been through a time of such challenge and uncertainty.

“Working with CliniSys will enable us to deliver a faster, safer and more efficient service which will ultimately result in better outcomes for our patients, both in Milton Keynes and across the rest of the network.”

CliniSys chief executive Richard Craven said:“We are delighted to be working with a pathology network that is so determined to put the clinician and the patient at the heart of everything it does.

“We are absolutely looking forward to working in partnership with the South 4 network on its WinPath Enterprise deployment and on demonstrating how a modern LIMS can act as a platform for innovation and equitable access to the technologies of the future.”

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Notes for editors

About CliniSys Group:

CliniSys Group is the largest laboratory diagnostic IT vendor in Europe, with leading country market shares and an innovative and wide-reaching suite of end-to-end diagnostic solutions.

Headquartered in England, with local offices in six European countries, it has for more than 40 years been at the forefront of diagnostics workflow, order communications and information management solutions supporting radiology, cardiology and all pathology disciplines including anatomical or cellular, molecular and genetics.

These encompass the complete workflow from order, clinical decision support, collection, processing, analysis, results and reporting, through integration into the clinical workflow. CliniSys Group has built an unrivalled reputation for the deployment of complex diagnostics networks and academic centres – and is the only vendor repeatably delivering across all disciplines end to end – at scale.