

South Yorkshire Ambulance Service

On-board laptops revolutionise NHS emergency care

Paramedics are delivering better patient care thanks to the introduction of new on-board laptops in their ambulances.

The laptops – known as ‘toughbooks’ – replace the traditional method of using paper forms to record the details of emergency incidents and the treatment administered to patients.

In-built touchscreen technology enables information to be inputted easily and quickly, providing emergency care teams with more detailed patient records.

Paramedics and emergency care practitioners (ECPs) working for South Yorkshire Ambulance Service (SYAS) are among the first in the country to test the new mobile technology.

Over 40 paramedics and technicians and 25 ECPs are now using toughbooks as they work shifts across Doncaster and Sheffield. The technology is linked to the accident and emergency department at Doncaster Royal Infirmary.

Matthew Syrat is a clinical supervisor paramedic based at Bentley ambulance station. He said: “It is so much quicker to input patient details compared to writing them all out on paper.

“Plus, the system gives you prompts, so you’re checking for more symptoms than you would have done before and you end up with a much more comprehensive patient record.”



Matthew Syrat, clinical supervisor paramedic, praises the system as quick and efficient

Rob Gorrige, one of 25 ECPs in Sheffield, says using a toughbook has transformed the way he works. “It’s just so easy to hit a button and input the information. The system is very user friendly and the potential to improve patient care is massive.”

SYAS introduced the toughbook technology as a pilot programme in June 2005. Up to 15 of the devices are now in use at any one time, either by paramedics or ECPs.

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Since its introduction, the software has been continually revised to take account of the round-the-clock emergency environment and the working practices of paramedics and their ECP colleagues.

Rob said: “Two of the Sheffield ECPs have been involved right from the start to ensure the equipment would be right for us and our role. It was important that it wasn’t too ambulance-specific.

“We found it wasn’t detailed enough for us at first and we were going to the free text box to add information. But with the ECP involvement, the system has been revised to give us what we need.”

Each patient record stored on the toughbooks is transmitted to a central data centre. These records can then be accessed – under strict role-based security measures - using a ‘webviewer’ system installed on PCs at the participating ambulance stations, Doncaster A&E and ambulance HQ.

Staff involvement helps pilot to move forward

Engaging emergency care staff in the use of the new toughbook technology from its inception was key to taking the project forward.

Using a toughbook has transformed the way ECP, Rob Gorringe works



Phil Mann, director of information, performance and communication at SYAS, said: “User acceptance is the main thing and we deliberately set the pilot up in two stages – the first phase was about getting everyone to understand the ambulance environment in which the toughbooks would be applied and getting user acceptance.

“We wanted to get people using the gadgets, and so the slight downside was around the quality of the information being inputted – it varied a lot.

“But in the second phase we were able to introduce more functionality to the device and we started to address the data quality issue.”

Training was provided and delivered over several sessions to accommodate the availability of paramedics and ECPs covering a 24-hour, seven days a week service.

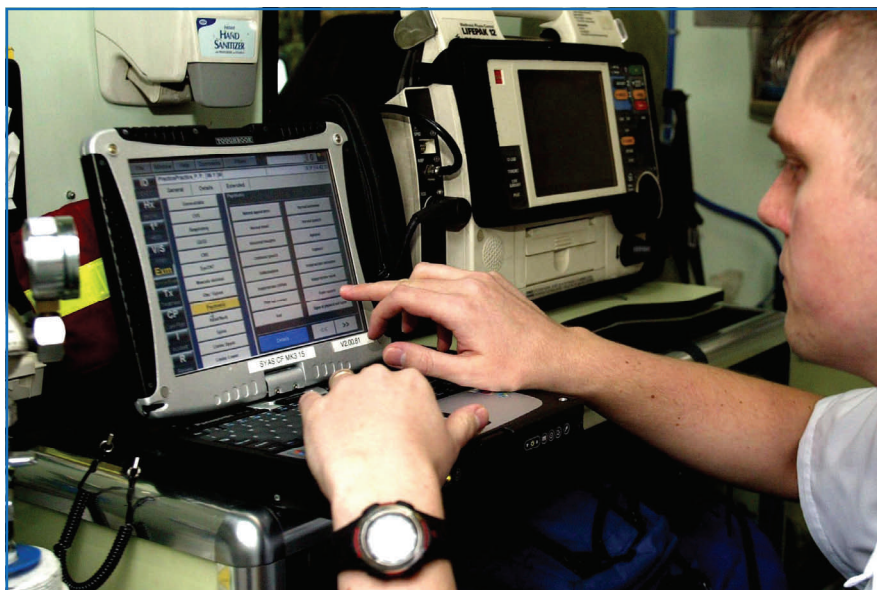
A project board kept the pilot on track and provided the necessary forum to iron out any issues.

Sue Cooper, director of operations at SYAS, chaired the project board. She said: “The key thing was to get buy-in and ownership so it was really important that we have people who would be using the system on the project board so they were part of the discussions as well as the managers who would be responsible for rolling the system out.

“I also went out with some of the crews to get a better understanding of their role – it’s the only way to get a real feel for how the technology is going to play out in the field.

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Toughbook technology improves patient care with speedier treatment by sending patients' notes to the hospital ahead of their arrival

easier for other clinicians to read patients notes.”

SYAS has found that the toughbook technology has supported the role of ECPs, and also continuity of care.

Matthew Syrat said: “It’s important that we show colleagues that this system makes their jobs easier. Everything is time-stamped so we know when we started an assessment, what time a drug was administered.

“It’s short term investment for long term gain.”

Emergency care team embraces toughbook benefits

Rob Gorringe has worked in the ambulance service for 20 years. His role now involves providing clinical expertise as an ECP, based at Middlewood station, as well as overseeing the Sheffield ECP team.

He finds the toughbook technology easy to use as he attends call outs in his emergency vehicle – an estate car in which he can sit and input a patient’s details.

“The system is very user friendly and quick,” said Rob. “It encourages you to include pertinent negatives, for example, no chest pain, no shortness of breath.

“It means records are becoming more standardised and the legibility of them is no longer a problem. You can also go back in on a record and add something before you send it off.

“You can also print off the information – it’s very structured and that makes it

“You can even get access to the BNF on the system so you can check overdose details and protocols about a patient’s medication while you’re there, on the spot, treating them.”

As well as improved care, the new system is delivering faster treatment for patients. “Because data is being continually sent to the ‘NETVIEW’ system, the inputted data on my tablet enables the receiving staff at the hospital to locate patient notes for our arrival, thus speeding up the treatment process,” said Matthew.

The paramedics and ECPs are also finding the new IT supports their own personal development. “The information is all there about the jobs or procedures you’ve done. We’re continually assessed and this helps demonstrate your capabilities.

Matthew added: “It’s also good for auditing – we can pull off figures about the number of patients we’ve seen, the type of calls and conditions we’ve dealt with.”

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