**Implementer - Interview Notes for eRedBag User Story**

**Name:** Keith Strahan

**Role:** Implementer for the eRedBag

**Role and background**

Keith is the Clinical Lead for the [**Social Care Programme**](https://digital.nhs.uk/services/social-care-programme) in NHS Digital.

Keith has a background as a social worker in adult social care in a variety of settings in London: hospitals (A&E, intensive care, older people’s wards, etc.), mental health, community, disability, and primary care.

Keith later led and implemented a range of large-scale projects that aimed to improve digital technology within adult social care and share information with the health sector. This included a London Project with, at its peak, 60 acute trusts and local authorities sharing information across London.

**Implementer Interview**

**Why is the Sutton eRedBag important?**

When the original **Red Bag** was started in Sutton, I attended several meetings and remember thinking, “what a deceptively simple, yet great idea”. It really highlighted the importance of information sharing between care homes and the NHS, with the bonus of using standardised documentation.

I was subsequently very pleased to hear that Sutton had applied for the [**Digital Social Care Pathfinder**](https://digital.nhs.uk/services/social-care-programme/digital-social-care-pathfinders-programme-2019-21) programme and was later successful in getting funding and support for its eRedBag project. It is one of many excellent pathfinder projects, including another eRedBag project from South Gloucester. Both eRedBag projects really complement each other and have been a powerful part of the Pathfinder Programme.

The South Gloucester eRedBag project has a focus predominately on what information is coming out of the hospital – whilst with Sutton there is more focus on what information is going in. To be able to see the whole picture you need both, and these projects together tell a powerful story.

South Gloucestershire and its surrounding areas already had an existing joint record system called ‘Connecting Care’, to which the first care homes in the area have now joined. This means, for example, that the hospital can automatically send a discharge summary notification to both the care home and the GP who can both then view it in the ‘Connecting Care’ system. The work in this project is important because it shows where we want to get to in the future; although not all care homes are digitally advanced enough to participate in this type of solution at present, even if it is available.

In addition, the health and social care context is extremely complex. London, for example, is a patchwork quilt of over 30 local authorities with many NHS hospitals, trusts, etc. There have been a variety of IT ‘integrated’ solutions, sometimes more than one in a locality! Information also needs to be shared across many geographical boundaries. It is great that London is developing a regional approach for shared care records, but the adult social care sector in the wider context, including local authorities and care providers, needs to be included in these plans.

With this as a background, the Sutton eRedBag project is undertaking outstanding work, focusing on digital solutions for care homes of different sizes and different levels of digital maturity. These include homes from larger organisation who are more likely to be ready to use advanced digital solutions, as well as smaller homes, where each step needs to be carefully considered because of limited resources.

Sutton’s eRedBag project involves a connected eRedBag sent from many care homes with multiple computer systems in their own locality. Furthermore, their national products include:

* National ‘eRedBag’ professional standards
* A national mobilisation pack of ‘How to Guides’
* A technical solution ready for national rollout.

Sutton’s work with social care system suppliers, such as those in[**CASPA**](https://caspa.care/), has also been a crucial component and has contributed greatly to the success of the project. Their ongoing work with the NHS Digital [**Reasonable Adjustments Flag**](https://digital.nhs.uk/services/reasonable-adjustment-flag) and [**National Record Locator**](https://digital.nhs.uk/services/national-record-locator) teams will help develop solutions across the country.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the NHS also has trusts and organisations at different levels of ‘digital maturity’ so we should not underestimate what social care can do. There is little that is happening in the NHS that social care cannot do but it tends to be on a much smaller scale at this moment in time.

Most care homes and domiciliary care providers are at the start of the digital journey. The trick lies in unlocking how each organisation can move forward. For some they are at the early stage of looking at how they can use secure email such as NHSmail instead of fax and post – that is fine – it is an important step.

The two pathfinder eRedBag projects, along with another project from the Hft, a national support provider for people with learning disabilities (rolling out ‘[**digital care passports’**](https://www.hearmenowapp.com/)), have been amazing at working collaboratively to develop a range of products. Together and individually, all three projects have been central to the pathfinder programme and have done fantastic work and will, I hope, influence the way integrated, personalised care and support develops for many years to come.

**Who is important to bring this kind of project about?**

For all care providers, completing the [**Data Security and Protection Toolkit**](https://www.dsptoolkit.nhs.uk/) is a fundamental building block towards better digital joined up working, and both eRedBag projects understood this from the start. The eRedBag projects are doing some great work in terms of highlighting the importance of information governance and cyber security and assisting care homes to meet the required standards.

This is so important because, until health and care providers can demonstrate that they have met the required standards within the toolkit, it is going to be difficult to participate in integrated digital solutions. And that is absolutely as it should be because we are dealing with sensitive information and organisations must show they can deal with it safely and securely.

**Tips for mobilisation. What has worked?**

Sutton are producing an amazing array of guidance in the form of how-to-guides, videos, stories – from all the different people and organisations who have been involved. These products will be of great assistance as the eRedBag is rolled out in London and elsewhere.

It’s also a great step forward to say that we’ve just had five [**new standards**](https://theprsb.org/standards/healthandcareintegration/) published, such as the [**About Me Standard**](https://theprsb.org/news/blogs-from-our-members-2/aboutme/), announced by the [**Professional Records Standards Body (PRSB)**](https://theprsb.org/) in November 2020. These standards are a direct consequence of the pathfinder programme and Sutton’s role in their development has been considerable.

For example, the new About Me Standard highlights the most important details that an individual wants professionals in health and social care to know about them. It might include how best to communicate with the person, how to help them feel at ease and how to reduce their anxiety- for example when having an injection, and who they would like to be with them. About Me information has always been an essential part of Red Bag information, but it is not just for people in care homes, it is for everyone.

These new standards are another building block that has emerged from the Social Care Programme and these can be used for years to come to develop better interoperability between health and social care digital systems across the country.

Another important aspect of Sutton’s work is that this kind of project does not just rely on the cooperation of hospitals, who are just one of the partners involved alongside care homes, GPs, ambulance services, software providers, etc. True integration should be centred on the person, with health and social care supporting them and their carers as appropriate.

**Challenges and opportunities of IT?**

The work with suppliers on this project has been exemplary. When we started, we did not have an umbrella organisation for social care software suppliers, and it was a challenge knowing where to start! We now have CASPA who are fully involved with the eRedBag in Sutton.

This has enabled significant developments such as CASPA using some national infrastructure called the National Record Locator (NRL) which can hold data coming in from different places in a central location (called the [**Spine**](https://digital.nhs.uk/services/spine)). This is so important because suppliers provide their software solutions to care homes in different parts of the country and ideally need to do this in one way.

Other national infrastructure in the mix includes the Reasonable Adjustments Flag (Reasonable adjustments comes under the Equality Act 2010). If you have a complex condition including learning difficulties or dementia the flag provides an immediate visible alert. This provides context, high level About Me information and can signpost to further information in more detailed shared records such as the person’s carer or the individual themselves. Eventually, the Flag could become a key component of the eRedBag. An example of its use could be when a person is admitted to a hospital from a care home, the flag would be visible to staff, giving them vital information about the person.

The timing of how these different but complementary initiatives could not be better and the Sutton eRedBag has been at the forefront of these developments.

**Monitoring and Reviewing the progress of the eRedBag initiative?**

The outputs from the Pathfinder projects will be published in Spring 2021. This will include blueprints, benefits, challenges, lessons learnt and opportunities for the future.

There is still some way to go to achieve real person led, integration between health and social care in England. We need to highlight just what great progress has been made already and how best to build on this outstanding work.

**What are the main system challenges?**

One major hurdle is that nationally, only about 40 % of care providers have software solutions. Over time, I am sure this will change and as it does there will be opportunities for care providers (not only care homes) to join up with shared care record initiatives whether local, regional, or national.

I believe the biggest barrier at present is culture change. Different sectors need to trust each other, to get ‘into each other’s shoes’ and learn more about each other’s situation, to enhance understanding.

**Hospitals?**

I spent 20 years as a social worker, including in hospitals, and I have such a high regard for the multi-disciplinary teams I worked in. I know just how good care and support can be and the response during the COVID pandemic has been further proof of what a fantastic range of professionals work in health and social care.

We have got to get the right engagement with hospitals to show how the eRedBag will help them by the availability of clearer, more accurate information to support decision making. In addition, the eRedBag is expected to reduce the number of people admitted to hospital. I have been really impressed by Sutton’s ‘eRedBag User Guide for Acute Staff’ which is just another one of the excellent products to come out of this project.

We need to improve the lot of everybody – there should be benefits for all, not least, the person and the carers we are supporting.