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Blackburn's new hospital completed on
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Case Study Royal Blackburn Hospital

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Linda Thompson, General Manager, Consort Healthcare



Blackburn’s New Hospital is Completed On Schedule and On Budget

In 2003, East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust awarded Consort Healthcare a £125 million Private Finance Initiative contract to design, build, finance and operate a new acute hospital in Blackburn. The concession period is 35 years.

Siemens was awarded a £45.5 million contract by Consort Healthcare to supply and maintain imaging equipment as well as a Picture Archiving and Communications System (PACS) which allows digital x-ray images to be viewed via monitors anywhere in the hospital. The contract value has since grown to £84 million, with Siemens responsible for supplying and maintaining 36 items of equipment.

Fact file

- Acute services in Blackburn were previously provided at two sites. The project involved extending one of them, Queens Park Hospital, to integrate all acute services at a single site, increasing the number of patient beds to 668.
- The new Royal Blackburn Hospital opened in 2006, on budget and on schedule.
- Consort Healthcare is a 50:50 joint venture between Balfour Beatty Capital Projects and HSBC.

Siemens Expertise

Sharing best practice

Tapping into Siemens’ specialist knowledge and experience of other projects early on reaped many dividends further down the line at Blackburn believes Linda Thompson, general manager at Consort Healthcare. “We definitely benefited from Siemens’ expertise in room design and patient flow, and having that input at the start of the programme was a big positive,” says Linda. “Without it, we would almost certainly have had issues to resolve later on when the equipment was being installed.”

Technical expertise

Siemens’ knowledge of how equipment works within a building meant they were able to advise the construction team on exactly what was needed. Explains Linda: “When we had questions about an MRI scanner because of humidity problems in the building, for example, the Siemens team instantly gave us all the answers we needed.”

Flexibility

Working with a flexible team, she says, makes everyone’s life much easier. “When Siemens began installing and commissioning equipment, parts of the building were unfinished so they had challenges such as getting a machine into a room that was still being painted. But they stuck to their project plan, regardless of what was going on around them. They just got on and made it happen.”

Trust and confidence

Alex Shepherd, radiology manager, believes trust is key to success. “We have confidence in the Siemens engineers and respect them,” she explains. “They provide a very good quality service and are very amenable. I’d find it very hard to work within a partnership like this with people we didn’t take to.”

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The Benefits of a Managed Equipment Service

High quality services

The PFI concept was not new to Linda Thompson: she came to the project having spent 15 years working in the Health Service. “Without PFI the NHS can’t move forward,” she believes. “It’s the only way to get superb new hospitals and high quality services.”

Latest technology and known costs

For Alex Shepherd, the clear benefit of an MES is having a planned, agreed and funded equipment replacement programme. “It means you’re guaranteed up-to-date equipment,” she says. “Plus you also gain from a fully comprehensive and planned maintenance programme and know exactly what it will cost.”

Faster procurement and cost savings

Alex acknowledges a potential concern of clinicians: the lack of choice when it comes to selecting equipment. Trust staff often have personal preferences for particular suppliers, she says, but argues their focus should be on the output specification. “As long as the kit does the job we want it to do, then whether it’s red or green shouldn’t matter. More important is knowing that in five years’ time it will be updated.”

“Siemens’ strong reputation for market-leading technology hopefully helps reassure clinicians,” adds Paul Milligan, head of PFI and major projects at Siemens. “Many senior figures that we speak to in different Trusts see the attractions of not going down the vendor independence route, such as faster procurement and cost savings.”

Successful completion

Inevitably, deadlines were tight at Blackburn and meeting them was critical. There were just 12 weeks between the new hospital being finished and the Trust moving in, during which time Siemens had to get all the new imaging equipment installed and up and running, as well as train staff in how to use it.

“We were very sceptical about whether it was achievable,” admits Linda Thompson. “But Siemens proved it was and to see it happen was fantastic. The Siemens site guys were superb, very calm and organised and they worked together very successfully with the construction team.”

Working as one team

“I’m especially proud of the way the Trust moved into the new hospital over a weekend, and Siemens were there throughout supporting Trust staff and wanting to be part of what was happening,” says Linda. “To move 600 people in five hours was a massive achievement for the Trust and everyone involved.”