



Connect Health

Annual Quality Account 2023-24

Community NHS, MSK, Persistent
Pain, Rheumatology & Mental Health
Services



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Introduction

Connect Health is a 2024 HSJ Partnership Award winning NHS provider organisation delivering community-based physical and mental health services across the UK. We have been working with the NHS since 1993 and are the largest specialist provider of community musculoskeletal (MSK) services in England, inclusive of rheumatology and persistent pain. We aim to support healthier communities by improving mental and physical health and currently deliver services across 22 ICB areas. Our established Single Point of Access (SPOA) Patient Care Coordination Centre manages over 350,000 patient referrals per annum. We continue to expand and are increasingly recognised for the provision of high quality, safe, cost-effective, and innovative approaches to care for NHS patients.

Our consultant-led, multi-disciplinary teams operate to the highest clinical standards, supported by the latest technology to enable patients to have quick and equitable access to services. We use bespoke systems, with patient referrals being quickly processed through our Patient Care Coordination Centre, where we ensure patients are seen by the right people, in the right place, at the right time. This is crucial to improving clinical outcomes and overall patient experience, where better care in the community is delivered locally and conveniently thus ensuring any unnecessary hospital appointments are avoided.

All our services are evidence-based and include self-management tools for patients, telephone/video and web-based advice and guidance, access to diagnostics, face-to-face and virtual assessment, treatment, and rehabilitation options, as well as up to date information resources for patients and GPs. This is supported by informatics services, providing unrivalled data insight into the clinical, operational, and financial outcomes from our services.

Connect Health services include the following:

- Established Referral Access and Signposting Service operating as a single point of access (SPOA), supported by central Patient Care Coordination (PCC)
- Patient choice regarding their preferred consultation medium: face to face, video or telephone
- A clinically developed Chatbot MSK Triage tool: “PhysioNow®”
- Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) clinical triage
- GP advice line and eRS advice and guidance function
- Tier 1 MSK services that are physiotherapy-led and aimed at the rehabilitation of patients with MSK conditions.
- Community MSK Specialist assessment and treatment services known as “CATS” or Clinical Interface Service
- Specialist Hand Therapy, Podiatry, Women’s Health, and Paediatric services
- Community-based Specialist Consultant outpatient services including Sport & Exercise Medicine and Orthopaedics
- Community Rheumatology and Osteoporosis (Denosumab injection therapy) services
- Interdisciplinary Persistent Pain Services
- Interventional pain management procedures delivered nationwide by through bespoke mobile clinical units
- Community-based musculoskeletal diagnostic ultrasound, joint and soft tissue injections (including ultrasound-guided injections)
- A public health campaign, “Flippin’ Pain™” that engages both public and professional audiences in a contemporary understanding of pain science and the biopsychosocial model of health, <https://www.flippinpain.co.uk/>
- Community Mental Health - IAPT and IAPT compliant Counselling services

1.1 Statement on Quality from the CEO

I am pleased to present our annual Quality Account for the year ending March 2024.

The preparation of this report provides an important opportunity for us to reflect on our performance and achievements over the last year, identifying the things we have done well, and the areas where further improvement is needed. This allows us to set the right objectives and priorities for the year to come.



Given the continued pressure on healthcare services, we have devoted significant effort to improving the efficiency and productivity of our services, to ensure timely access for patients, while ensuring quality and delivering value for money for commissioners. Waiting times are a key indicator of our progress and I am pleased that, on average, these have continued to reduce across our services over the last year. At the same time, we have seen patient-reported experience improve, with the Friends and Family test sitting above 90% positive feedback. Patient-reported outcomes have also improved, and we saw our highest results of recent years in the last 6 months, these continuing to track ahead of sector norms for similar services. Overall, we have made good progress, but as always there is more to do and further reductions to waiting times experienced by some of our patients will remain a priority for the next year.

Clinical Excellence, one of our key priorities, has benefited from enhanced training and development for our clinicians, and improvements to our clinical pathways in areas such as patient group sessions and classes. The introduction of a new patient portal aims to make it easier for patients to access information about their care and manage their interactions with our services.

We have further enhanced our Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) agendas, successfully launching the new Patient Safety Incident Response Framework (PSIRF), alongside retaining our quality ISO9001 and information management ISO27001 certifications. We are also progressing well toward the environmental ISO14001 accreditation. The introduction of tools to assess our social impact are providing pleasing evidence of the contribution we are making to the communities we work with.

Our journey to provide services to more patients continues and we are delighted to be delivering new services in a number of areas across the country, across both our Musculoskeletal (MSK) and mental health specialisms. Our work to improve health literacy around chronic and persistent pain has also developed further, with a major 'Flippin' Pain' campaign with partners in the north of England, that was recognised at the Health Service Journal awards.

Finally, our colleagues are reporting higher levels of engagement and satisfaction, a hugely important factor for the sustainability of healthcare services. This, the result of focused actions to support the well-being of our people, such as the introduction of 25 mental health first aiders.

As a partner to the NHS we take our responsibility, to deliver the best outcomes with the highest value for money, very seriously. We have made progress across the objectives we set in the last year and have a solid foundation for continued improvement and innovation in the next year.

Mike Turner, CEO

1.2 Chief Medical Officer's Statement

As the largest provider of community MSK services to the NHS, every year brings change, some dictated externally but for Connect Health much is generated internally to fit with our values of Quality, Pioneering, People-centred and Dynamic.

We have during the last 12 months developed, with wide input from clinicians, a defined new “**Clinical Strategy**” which has tasks and deadlines for delivery with responsibility for this shared across our many NHS services whether Physiotherapy, MSK, Pain, Rheumatology or Talking Therapy services.



The principles guiding this clinical strategy are:

1. Optimised Clinical Delivery
2. Leaders at all levels
3. Facilitating high performing Clinicians
4. Continuous Improvement and Innovation
5. Data insight and Utilisation

The strategy defines what we do:

- Deliver and continually assure clinical quality (safety, patient experience, and clinical outcomes) for all patients seen within services.
- Enable clinical colleagues to provide safe and effective care through the provision of purposeful Learning and development (L&D) and supervision.
- Define and deliver best practice across specialties, professional groups, and pathways enabled through innovation, improvement, and a research culture.
- Attract, inspire, and transform a multi-professional workforce across specialties to provide high-quality, sustainable, and innovative care models.

It also defines specific Key Performance Indicator's (KPI's) which are reviewed monthly to track performance aligned to our shared clinical purpose.

As part of our Pioneering value, despite still being at the forefront of data usage from a data warehouse, we have now upgraded the warehouse to “version 2” plus taken outcome collection out of clinics and into a patient portal. This provides a wider range of measures and more reliable data reported by patients independently without influences at clinical settings.

Given we provide services across England, the variation we see between services is of great interest and our ambition is to fully understand why such variation exists and bring the lower outcome services nearer to the higher performing.

We have also joined the National MSK Audit and Research Database project which is operated by Keele University where health inequality identification is one key outcome to add to our existing data. Given our size and data maturity we will be the largest contributor to the pooled national data for audit and research outcomes and in return will be able to benchmark internally and externally.

Our clinicians continue to benefit from our excellent learning Academy which accommodates all our clinicians from many professional backgrounds. We are proud to be the first provider to identify our clinicians as “MSK Clinicians” rather than by professional group name hence whether a physiotherapist, sports therapist, osteopath, occupational therapist chiropractor or podiatrist, the knowledge and skills to provide high quality are assured through our Academy Clinical Supervision and data feedback- reflected in excellent clinical outcomes from all groups.

The NHS remains under huge pressure and Connect Health remains a key provider and innovator in community services. We remain committed to collaborating with more partners in primary and secondary care to help secure the future of our NHS.

Dr Graeme Wilkes, Consultant (SEM), Chief Medical Officer

1.3 Statement of Assurance

We confirm that this, our Quality Account for 2023-2024, presents a true picture of the quality of services we provide, that the information is reliable and accurate and there are proper controls over the collection and reporting of data.

We confirm that this Quality Account conforms to the Department of Health guidance and is open to scrutiny and review.



1st June 2024
Mike Turner
CEO



1st June 2024
Dr Graeme Wilkes, Consultant (SEM)
Chief Medical Officer



1.4 Further Information and Feedback

If you would like any of the following:

- to give us feedback on any aspect of this Quality Account
- a hard copy of this quality account
- a copy to read it in a different language
- to talk to someone about your experiences of our community MSK services
- to find out more about how to access our services.

Please email access@connecthealth.co.uk or phone 0191 250 4580.

Service specific Information

For each of our NHS services, the website details:

- Services on offer
- Meet the team – photos and bios
- Patient guides and information in PDF to download
- Detailed information about each clinic – full contact information, directions, parking, opening hours, what to do on arrival, additional services, frequently asked questions
- Patient resources – informative and educational videos, PDFs, and links to credible websites

If you have any questions or require assistance in accessing our website, please email: integratedgovernance@connecthealth.co.uk or phone 0191 250 4580.



1.5 Connect Health's Environmental Sustainability Plan

Connect Health's Sustainability Plan has recently been updated and uploaded to our website where it can be located via the following link: [Sustainability Plan](#)



1.6 Quality Assurance and Quality Management

Quality Assurance at Connect Health is a key priority. Our service standards are benchmarked against local and national regulatory and legal requirements, as well as those defined through specific regulatory bodies and organisations such as the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP), the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), the General Medical Council (GMC), the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and the NHS Information Centre, NHS Digital.

We undertake routine structured audits of our services, as well as external certification and inspections. Our quality audits are aligned to the ISO 9001 standard; these mirror the requirements for CQC compliance as well as guidance from centres of excellence, for example the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).

We aim to deliver consistently high standards to all our stakeholders, not least to the patients who put their trust in our care. We continue to impress upon our colleagues the importance of speaking up whenever they have concerns, learning from any incidents and feedback and apologising openly when we are at fault. Our commitment to the new Patient Safety Incident Response Framework and our ongoing work with our Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and Ambassadors reiterates this. All the initiatives that we have in place allow us to improve

services for the future benefit of those who receive our care by learning from all feedback received.

1.6.1 ISO Accreditation

Connect Health are accredited to the ISO27001 standard, demonstrating that we provide the level of security needed to protect our organisation's information. ISO27001 is a globally recognised standard for the management of Information Security Management Systems (ISMS). Conformity with the standard means that we have put in place a system to manage risks related to the security of data owned or handled by the company. We are committed to continuously improving and evolving our policies and processes, and over the last 12 months we have implemented several improvements to our ISMS, including:

- Increased the scope of our accreditation from Connect Health Pain Services, to cover the full organisation (Connect Health)
- Introduced phishing simulation exercises to gauge understanding that our organisational awareness of data security is appropriate (including the effectiveness of mandatory training). This is a cyber exercise that assesses our organisation's ability to recognise and respond to a phishing attack (a fraudulent email, text or voice message designed to trick people into providing sensitive information)
- Trialling Windows 11 ahead of Windows 10 'End Of Life', to ensure integration is effective with current clinical and corporate applications
- Introduced new policies around Shadow IT and Use of AI Tools to guide colleagues

Our Information Security Forum monitors the effectiveness of our ISMS. It is attended by key senior stakeholders who meet monthly to discuss key information security and information governance topics.

Connect Health is also accredited to the ISO9001 standard. ISO9001 certification is an external conformity assessment or control mechanism to assure and regulate quality.

Connect Health is also aiming to extend its ISO portfolio in 2024 by applying for ISO14001 which is the internationally recognised standard for environmental management systems (EMS). In an age of heightened environmental consciousness and increasing global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion, all organisations have a pivotal role to play. ISO14001 offers a structured approach for Connect Health to address these pressing concerns. By adopting this standard, Connect Health is signalling a commitment not only to regulatory compliance but also to ongoing environmental improvement. This proactive approach to environmental management will result in tangible benefits, such as reduced waste, energy conservation, and cost savings.

1.6.2 Quality Assurance and Our Audit programme

Connect Health's quality assurance and audit programmes provides us and our commissioners with the opportunity to:

- Measure performance against local and contractual quality standards
- Benchmark quality standards between services for comparison
- Benchmark against external standards (where these are published)
- Identify service improvements to meet or improve standards of care

- Participate in future national audit and research - such as through Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnerships (HQIP)

Our audit cycle feeds into our process for continuous improvement, ensuring standards are maintained, delivery is re-evaluated, and future healthcare models are developed from the lessons we have learnt or evidence from external sources, to derive continued benefits for patients, commissioners, and colleagues.

The quality of our services is reviewed quarterly at Connect Health's Clinical Governance Committee meetings, as well as at local and regional groups, Contract Service Review meetings with the ICBs.

Audits completed and learnt from across the organisation and in each region in 2023-24 were:

- Clinical Documentation Audit
- Infection Prevention and Control Audit
- Medicines Management - Injection Therapy Audit
- Diagnostic Imaging Referrals Safety and Quality Audit
- Triage Quality Audit
- Right Place, Right Time (MSK, Rheum, Pain, ESWT)
- Confirmed Serious Diagnosis Audit
- Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk Audit
- Data Quality Audit – incidents and complaints
- Physio Partner Report Quality Assurance
- Radiation Dosage Audit

Improving quality audit and reporting is further discussed in section 2.



1.7 Regulatory Compliance

1.7.1 Care Quality Commission (CQC) Inspections and Compliance

For the Connect Health Group our current CQC rating is Good overall with Outstanding in the Well-Led domain.

The Connect Health Group holds 2 CQC regulated provider arms:

- Connect Health Ltd
- Connect Health Pain Services – NW CATS

We have a robust approach to internal quality assurance monitoring so that we can benchmark ourselves internally and externally. Assuring excellent quality service delivery is of primary importance to Connect Health. Evidencing quality assurance allows us to govern, regulate and improve the services provided by our administrative, clinical, and managerial/leadership colleagues.

Connect Health Ltd

Our current CQC rating is Good overall with Outstanding in the Well-Led domain. As such, no enforcement notices or improvement plans have been issued by the CQC to Connect Health and we have no ongoing CQC investigations.

Connect Health Ltd is registered with the (CQC) under the following Regulated Activities:

CQC Registration	Reference Number
CQC Organisation Identification number	1-151592833
1. Transport services, triage and medical advice provided remotely	FR25212_2_2
2. Diagnostic and screening procedures	FR25212_2_3
3. Treatment of disease, disorder, or injury	FR25212_2_1

Since our registration with the CQC in 2011, Connect Health has had 3 inspections, all of which demonstrated Connect Health have met the required CQC standards. For our most recent (May 2021) report, see [Connect Health Limited \(cqc.org.uk\)](https://www.cqc.org.uk/public/inspections/2021/151592833).

Connect Health Pain Services – NW CATs

Our current CQC rating is Good overall with Outstanding in the Well-Led domain. As such, no enforcement notices or improvement plans have been issued by CQC to Connect Health and we have no ongoing CQC investigations.

Connect Health Pain Services – NW CATs is registered with the (CQC) under the following Regulated Activities:

CQC Registration	Reference Number
CQC Organisation Identification number	1-127869588

4. Diagnostic and screening procedures	FR25212_2_3
5. Treatment of disease, disorder, or injury	FR25212_2_1

Connect Health Pain Services – NW CATs was inspected in December 2022. For our most recent (Dec 2022) report, see [Connect Health Limited \(cqc.org.uk\)](https://cqc.org.uk).

1.7.2 NHS Digital Compliance (DSP Toolkit)

Connect Health are successfully certified as “standards met” to the DSP Toolkit. We have maintained certification to DTAC, DCB0129 and DCB0160 (which are clinical risk management standards that manufacturers and deployers of health IT systems and applications need to comply with). These standards are governed by NHS England and compliance is mandatory under the Health and Social Care Act 2012. It is designed to help evidence the clinical safety of IT/digital products and ensure that digital health technology can mitigate clinical risk. We have also recently submitted our evidence to accredit to DCB1596, which is the secure email standard for health and care organisations to assure their email service to enable safe email communications with NHS organisations. The outcome of that is pending.

1.7.3 NHS Provider Licence (NHS England)

In November 2016, Connect Health became registered with Monitor which provided us with an NHS Provider Licence to deliver services for our NHS contracts. Confirmation of adherence is submitted via self-certification against G6 Licence Conditions, which is required annually, 2 months after the end of Connect Health’s financial year in August. Since 2016, Connect Health has met all the requirements from NHS Improvement (formally Monitor) and met all the relevant criteria for ongoing registration and approval of our NHS Provider Licence.



1.8 Contribution to National Audit Databases and Research

Connect Health has a long history of undertaking a meaningful and robust clinical audit programme. 2023-24 has seen us move to a more comprehensive programme on a bi-annual basis that allows for not only more audits to be completed but also ensures they are meaningful and drive both assurance and improvement.

Our market-leading data reporting capability through our Data Warehouse which updates daily, provides easily accessible data dashboards with a wealth of contemporaneous data thus informing continuous improvement, reduction in unwarranted clinical treatment variation and hence better outcomes for patients. Data can be individualised to meet the needs of clinicians, commissioners, internal governance, and performance monitoring. Benchmarking of clinicians, services, and regional/national service provision which is adjusted for local demographics is key to ensuring service performance, quality and safety is maximised to benefit patients, taxpayers, and colleagues.

Given our data rich environment, research, and external dissemination of the learning we gain is important to us and allows benchmarking amongst providers.

1.8.1 Research Output

Connect Health continues to establish itself as an organisation publishing research on a regular basis, with the outcomes used to understand the impact on clinical delivery and the development of effective patient treatment programmes, at a local and national level. This work is led-by our Quality Improvement Project and Policy Group (QIPP). The remit of this group is to provide strategic oversight to our research, quality improvement, audit programme and guideline utilisation.

Throughout 2023-24, Connect Health have continued to remain research active through the initiation and delivery of own research, ongoing and new collaborations with various universities, and the introduction of an embedded research programmes including PhD studentships.



1.9 Clinical Governance

At Connect Health, clinical governance remains at the heart of our business and our culture. It is used to support our patient-professional partnership, to ensure consistent delivery of high quality, safe and effective services, with excellent clinical outcomes and patient experience. We are passionate about patient safety whilst continuing to be innovative with our systems and processes.

The Clinical Governance Framework (CGF) provides the organisation with cohesive structures within which clinical practice is delivered and measured. This has synergy with the Clinical Strategy and Operational Directorate Plan that have been developed in 2023-24. The CGF also provides a vehicle for the safe implementation of change, based on service needs, incorporating colleague and patient feedback and evidence-based practice. This allows the organisation to effectively meet the needs of its stakeholders including patients, commissioners, GPs, and colleagues.

Our clinical leadership structure allows local ownership and accountability of clinical governance. Our meeting structure enables the reporting, monitoring, and learning from Board to Floor and Floor to Board on all areas of risk to patient safety, clinical effectiveness, and patient experience. These include:

- Integrated Quality, Audit and Compliance Committee (IQACC)
- Clinical Governance Committee (CGC)
- Quality Improvement Project and Policy Group (QIPP)
- Medicines Management Group (MMG)
- National Safeguarding Panel (NSP)
- Risk Management Committee (RMC)

The board gains assurance on the effectiveness of all clinical governance processes via our assurance committee, the Integrated Quality, Audit and Compliance Committee (IQACC) chaired by an independent Non-Executive Director. Regular reporting is received by the Board which includes Patient Stories where upon occasionally patients attend in person. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) continue to undertake regular site visits and walkabouts of our services across the country to increase visibility and to increase awareness of any issues affecting local services. This further demonstrates our board to floor approach and the value Connect Health places upon this.

1.9.1 Developments in Clinical Governance

Over the course of 2023-24, Connect Health has built on the substantial progress made in the previous year specifically around the management of Patient Safety, Patient Feedback and Risk. The restructure undertaken in the previous year has continued to ensure job roles align with our Clinical Governance priorities. This has led to a demonstrable improvement in the quality of investigations as well as our responsiveness to Patient Safety Incidents and Patient Complaints.

Connect Health has fully embraced the Patient Safety Incident Response Framework (PSIRF) and has published our PSIRF Plan and Policy following approval from our nominated Lead Integrated Care Board, which in this case is Greater Manchester. We have brought in external

trainers to ensure all investigators are trained to a high standard in line with PSIRF. Oversight training for our Senior Leadership Team has also been provided by external trainers.

Learning from Patient Safety Events (LFPSE) has been fully rolled out across Connect Health and we are now submitting nationally as per requirements. This involved a reconfiguration of our incident reporting form and additional training for colleagues.

The management of complaints continued to be a focus in 2023-24. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has been instrumental in driving forward improvements in our response rates for complaint and incidents and this is a metric that is regularly reviewed by the SLT with associated changes as are required. Regular Complaints Lessons Learned and Action reports are shared with the wider business and all key themes are discussed at our Clinical Governance Committee for onward dissemination.

The culture of risk management is well embedded within the SLT in Connect Health. The Risk Register forms the basis of each governance meeting and is central to the effective functioning of the day-to-day business. There are formal links between the incidents and complaint actions and risk management to ensure mitigation is monitored. The national Risk Management Committee ensures ongoing monitoring of controls at Director level of the organisation. We have also developed an organisational Board Assurance Framework (BAF) which is being used to inform future objectives and strategy at Board level. The BAF is discussed both at Board and IQACC.

Throughout 2023-24, Connect Health has engaged with our ICB partners and is an active participant in the relevant regional Patient Safety Networks. Connect Health is confident that PSIRF will continue to improve our patient safety culture and will be pivotal in ensuring we continue to learn lessons.



1.10 Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

At Connect Health, our dedication to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) remains paramount as we continually adapt to the evolving landscape of societal perspectives.

In 2023-24, the EDI committee, along with its appointed ambassadors, has made significant strides. We are proud to have developed as a committee and are particularly pleased with the dedication of our ambassadors. Additionally, we have expanded our portfolio by establishing three working groups focusing on Patients, Colleagues and Outreach & Communication. The EDI Committee is at the forefront of our efforts to enhance and embed EDI within Connect Health. Our goal is to ensure compliance with regulatory standards, (in line with the Equality Delivery System), while also creating tangible value for all stakeholders. Through collaborative efforts, we aim to foster an inclusive environment where every individual feels safe, supported, and empowered to thrive.

In line with our commitment to driving meaningful change, Connect Health actively participated in Race Equality Week's 5-day challenge, providing colleagues with opportunities for self-reflection, education, and action to advance race equality within our organisation and beyond. Additionally, we commemorated International Women's Day (IWD) by amplifying the voices of our colleagues, who shared their inspiring stories and reflections on the significance of IWD, further reinforcing our collective commitment to gender equality. We have also devised an annual calendar to engage in, honour and celebrate cultural and EDI events.

Furthermore, we have diligently worked to revise internal policies and processes to further enhance accessible information for our patient and carer communities, ensuring that everyone has equal access to the vital resources and support they need to make informed decisions about their health and care.

To ensure Connect Health's contributions towards reducing health inequalities gaps, we initiated the development of local health inequalities action plans in all our services to ensure a tailored and targeted approach relevant to the local populations we serve. As an example, our South Tyneside local action plan was featured in the Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance (ARMA) "MSK Health Inequalities and Deprivation" report as an exemplary model for others to follow.

As we move forward, Connect Health remains steadfast in our dedication to fostering a culture of equality, diversity, and inclusion across all aspects of our organisation. We are unwavering in our pursuit of a healthcare environment that values and uplifts every individual, enriching the lives of our patients, colleagues, and society as a whole.



Section 2

Review of Quality Performance & Improvements for 2023/2024



Effectiveness and Patient Experience

'Clinical Excellence' is one of our organisational strategic priorities. Reflecting this priority, a focused Clinical Strategy for 2023-25 was developed, outlining how we will assure and improve patient experience and outcomes.

During 2023-24, we have continued to realise the benefits seen from moving to an inclusive digital capture of Patient Related Outcome Measures (PROMs) and Patient Related Experience Measures (PREMs) across MSK, Pain, Rheumatology, and Talking Therapies. The PROMs we collect align to NHSE Best MSK recommendations and resulted in Connect Health being an early adopter/onboarder as part of the 'National MSK Audit' being led by Keele University. Through this work, we have been able to benchmark our performance internally and externally to assure our pathways and identify focused areas for improvement.



2.1 Clinical Outcomes

Our enhanced suite of metrics includes specialty-specific PROMs, baseline demographic information and associated clinical factors.

We have moved automation of electronic PROMs onto a new and larger data platform, compliant with DTAC, DCB0160, DCB0129. PROMs are captured electronically ahead of appointments via weblink accessed by either email or text. To help ensure data captured reflects our patient populations they are enabled by a variety of accessibility options e.g., completion in preferred languages.

We collect PROMs before first assessment, at discharge, and at 3 months and 12 months post-discharge. PROMs are completed by patients remote from their clinician to minimise bias. At first appointment, clinicians have access to individual patient PROM scores and responses via SystmOne, so they can individualise the consultation and focus on what matters most to each patient. As our datasets grow, service-level demographic data comparisons with local population demographic data, will enable us to better understand who is accessing our service, who is not, and help direct outreach and engagement activities.

For 2023-24, we have collected 67,000 datasets across our MSK services, achieving a mean score shift (MSK-HQ) of 6.59. Most patients therefore demonstrating improvement that exceeds the minimum clinically important difference (MCID) rate of 5.0 which is a national measurement. To identify and co-create solutions to further optimise PROM completion rates, improve access, and reduce inequalities we sought feedback from patients, (who had and who had not, completed PROMs), including from some underserved patient populations. Learning from this feedback has led to several iterative changes e.g., relating to messaging targeting and multi-channel communications.

Data dashboards enable our Clinical Delivery Leads to self-serve live data, and review KPIs monthly and quarterly to identify and address themes or areas of concern. These display baseline characteristics, demographics, PROM completion rates as well as PROM shift scores and other data. Functionality includes the ability to filter and pivot data to identify any patterns over time which might require increased focus. As a result, we continue to be at the forefront of PROM collection and use this data to learn and improve clinical pathways and patient care.

As per the NHS talking therapies standards and NICE guidelines, evidence-based psychological treatments are provided at the appropriate dose (number of sessions), and by an appropriately qualified, experienced, and supervised clinician, depending on the individual's mental health needs, in order to provide safe and effective care. Session-by-session routine outcome measures are undertaken so that treatment progress is monitored, and care adjusted accordingly.

2.2 Measuring Patient Experience

Excellent patient-centred care is at the heart of Connect Health's clinical philosophy and strategy. We are also proud to have partnered with the Personalised Care Institute (PCI). All colleagues complete Personalised Care training and can access other related training (e.g., Shared Decision Making, Communication and Conflict Resolution Training).

We seek patient feedback via the Friends and Family Test, collected by an independent source at multiple points in a patient's journey, through feedback surveys as well as complaints, incidents, and compliments.

We set service and speciality wide performance objectives in keeping with external standards and commissioned KPIs (e.g. the percentage of people accessing our services who provide a positive response). Most of our patients would recommend our services, reflecting a positive experience. They regularly comment on the compassion, knowledge, and professionalism of our clinicians. For example, our mean FFT across our rheumatology services was 95%.

Responses can be broken down by contract, service-line (Physio, CATs, Pain etc.) and by individual clinician, so we can provide positive, meaningful feedback to clinicians on their performance, from their individual patient's perspectives. Scores are reviewed regularly and reported to the commissioners quarterly through our quality reporting.

To further encourage a continuous focus on improving patient experience, we identify any local or national areas of concern or themes, investigate and then action any indicated changes. Equally, where excellent practice is identified, we share this learning across our services. This is supported by our "Patient and Public Experience Forum," chaired by our Head of Patient Engagement.

Every service has a Health Inequalities Action Plan, aligned to local priorities, to better reach, understand and collaborate, as part of a systems wide approach to reducing health inequalities. This is to ensure that we take a tailored and targeted approach relevant to the local populations that we serve. As an example, our South Tyneside local action plan was featured in the Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance "MSK Health Inequalities and Deprivation" report as an illustration of best practice to others.



2.3 Clinical Audit

A new Head of Audit and Quality position has been created and in post since April 2023. The role sits within the Integrated Governance team. The aim is to oversee the structures, processes and outcomes related to Clinical Audit. The role focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of our services, driving continuous improvement initiatives, and forms part of the risk management in providing valuable insights to identify any potential risks or issues whilst supporting strategic decision-making.

Other key aspects of the work include the implementation and oversight of:

Audit planner: our two-year planner that outlines which audits we will complete, in which services, across all clinical specialities.

Audit analysis: working with subject matter experts to develop the service-level and organisational-level analysis of our audits to accurately report performance and identify any required actions.

Audit action tracker: to effectively monitor and track the implementation of audit recommendations and corrective actions across each of our services and at an organisational level.



2.4 Clinical Supervision

All clinicians have regular and robust clinical supervision. Whilst clinical supervision can be individual or group-based, there is a minimum requirement set for individual supervision and for direct observation of practice. A supervision record is completed for every session and a related dashboard provides visibility and enables reporting externally for commissioners and internally for learning and policy assurance. We continue to make iterative improvements to both the record and the dashboard. Supervision themes inform organisation level Learning Needs Analysis and delivery. Clinical supervision training is accessed via the Connect Health Academy, and we are further developing the training for supervisors, in addition to supporting colleagues to attend external supervisor training.



2.5 Clinical Education

Connect Health continue to commit to 'facilitating high-performing clinicians' as part of our Clinical Strategy 2023-2025.

We continue to demonstrate our commitment to the development of the future healthcare workforce, having supported 71 student placements through 11 different Health Education Institutions. We continue to receive exceptionally good feedback on our placement offering and experience. Following on from our student placements, 31 new graduates have completed their 18-month 'Accelerated Development Programme' which supports their preceptorship into MSK.

A review of the structure of our Academy (internal Learning and Development platform) has been undertaken and recommendations made for further evolution. We have seen a growing return to face-to-face local in-service training and educational sessions, having seen these reduce previously on account of COVID-19 restrictions and further integration around this within the portfolio of clinical education within the Academy will be developed.

Our Academy continues to develop new learning content including new modules in Pain and MSK, alongside the introduction of paediatric modules and leadership development. A Clinical Learning Needs Analysis has been undertaken for the organisation and this will inform future educational content development.



2.6 Research and Quality Improvement

Having previously established a reputation for research on a regular basis, 2023-24 has seen Connect Health continue to be research active, increasing the size and complexity research undertaken through university collaboration. For example, our involvement in our first randomised controlled trial.

Aligned to our values of pioneering and dynamic, and delivered through our Clinical Strategy, we have committed to an ambitious roadmap of continuous improvement and innovation across new pathways, new workforce models, and innovative technology.

2.6.1 Research

Research activity completed or ongoing within Connect Health for 2023-24:

- 2 x peer-reviewed publications
- Current injection therapy practice
- Flippin' Pain impact
- 1 x PhD completion
- Optimising the use of diagnostics within primary/community care.
- 2 x embedded PhD students (within their clinical role).
- Education for tendinopathy
- Flippin' Pain impact
- 3 x completed research studies currently undergoing peer-review.
- 6 x ongoing research studies in collaboration with university partners.
- Sciatica: assessment and treatment – University of Oxford
- Carpal Tunnel: assessment and treatment – University of Oxford
- Chronic pain: provider perceptions – London Metropolitan University
- Wrist pain: survey of current practice - Sheffield Hallam University
- Flippin' arthritis: reconceptualising osteoarthritis – University of South Australia
- Pain and Frailty: new care models – University of Bradford

2.6.2 Quality Improvement (QI)

For the fourth year in a row, all service leads (clinical/operational) have had a shared objective to initiate and deliver a quality improvement project that aligns service need to Clinical Strategy. This continues to reflect the embedding of QI principles within our culture following an initial focus on training and understanding these principles. Projects focus on improving patient flow, waiting times, outcomes, experience, inclusion, and financial efficiency.

Each year culminates in a QI showcase event where the impact, output and learning of each project is shared across all services so that that improvement can be maximised. For the first time in 2023-24, this showcase was attended by leaders from all business functions (e.g., IM&T, Finance) to further enable a QI culture, and provide increased opportunity for innovation and improvement.



2.6.3 External Policy

Connect Health colleagues have presented (invited speakers, poster presentations, facilitated workshops) at several virtual and in-person conferences and study days including:

- Therapy Live
- MSK Conference
- NHSE People Team Conference
- Physiotherapy Pain Association Conference
- Allied Health Professionals Independent Healthcare Providers: Practice Learning Event

In addition, Connect Health contribute to external national policy and practice developments through committee and project group membership including:

- British Pain Society Pain Management Programme SIG Committee
- British Pain Society Education Committee
- NICE Adoption and Impact Reference Panel
- National Spinal Network
- Physiotherapy Pain Association Committee
- Independent Health Care Providers Network
- Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine



2.7 Our Commitment to Our Colleagues

2.7.1 Developing Colleagues

Multi-professional Workforce

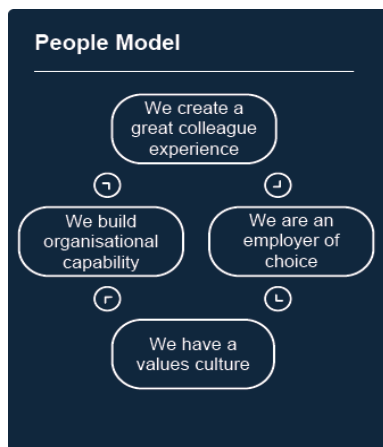
Connect Health has a national workforce of c.830 colleagues (c.500 clinical/c.330 support). The majority of our colleagues are directly employed, but to achieve a fully flexible multidisciplinary workforce, we also have 39 bank colleagues, 19 locums and 34 sessional workers.

Our clinical and support teams work together to deliver excellence in patient care through our four core values of: People Centred, Dynamic, Quality and Pioneering. All clinical colleagues have the necessary professional registrations in place, and we monitor their delivery of patient care through close supervision, ensuring their CPD is always prioritised.

In 2023-24, we adapted our organisational structure to enhance our clinical leadership and services to patients. We introduced a Director of Clinical Strategy and strengthened our clinical leadership structure, creating a Head of Clinical Delivery South and National Lead for MSK and a Head of Clinical Delivery South and National Lead for Long-Term Pain, which has further strengthened Connect Health to have scalable multidisciplinary services that help us to grow and adapt to support the needs of patients in geographical areas, a range of health conditions and occupations.

In 2023-24 we have embedded the new People Team structure (restructured in 2022/2023) and delivered against our People Plan whereby the strategic aim is to have the right people with the right skills, now and for the future to deliver growth, excellence in patient care and innovation.

The People Plan outlines the 'People Model' we work to that drives our intentions and the 'People Deliverables' we will deliver to enable our future direction and operational planning and priorities.



- **Attract Talent:** We aspire to be a great place to work with high quality candidates and colleagues who support our company and brand. We will be an employer of choice!
- **Agile and Innovative Culture:** We live our values, respond to change, and adapt through flexibility and responsiveness. Our colleagues' individual needs will be considered and supported!
- **Leadership Effectiveness:** Our leaders will be encouraged to collaborate and be empowered to make decisions and accept responsibility for company performance. Our leaders will be inspiring role models of our values!
- **Optimised Skills:** We aspire to be a great place to work with high quality candidates and colleagues who support our Company and brand. We will be an employer of choice!
- **Inclusivity and Engagement:** Our workforce will embrace diversity with a culture of inclusivity that puts wellbeing first and enables a colleague voice. Our colleagues will be supported to be their best!

Colleague surveys: We delivered four pulse surveys aligned to our values where overall colleagues noted several improvements. Our response rate increased from 65% to 80% and engagement score from 6.8 to 7.1 out of 10. Our colleagues rated Connect as 7.8/10 for “the work we do has a positive contribution to communities” and 7.8/10 for “the leadership team contributes to a positive work culture”. These results show that we have a high performing workforce, focused on delivering excellence in patient care.

Colleague wellbeing: At Connect Health we believe the wellbeing of our colleagues contributes to supporting them to deliver excellence in patient care. In 2023-24 we introduced a new benefits platform to boost our colleague health and financial wellbeing. It provides access to quick GP appointments, free counselling, wellbeing assessments, diet, exercise, and financial advice as well as shopping discounts. The platform also includes health lifestyle and environment choices such as cycle to work and electric vehicles. The investment in this new arrangement of colleague benefits has received excellent feedback from our colleagues.

Celebrating success: Celebrating success is at the heart of our company values. In 2023-24 we hosted North and South annual award ceremonies, attended by 650 of our colleagues. Colleagues nominated each other for a wide range of awards (demonstrating our values, rising star, graduate of the year, leader of the year, team of the year, outstanding contribution, apprentice of the year and going the extra mile). Over 500 nominations were submitted, with 27 winners and 27 highly commended, highlighting exemplary practice in supporting our patients and our colleague's commitment to Connect Health.

Colleague Voice: In 2023-24 we established a new Colleague Engagement Group and Equality and Diversity Committee to sit alongside our Freedom to Speak Up Network, all of which ensure colleagues are supported and opportunities exist to put forward ideas and give feedback. Through these groups we have responded to feedback and introduced a Mental Health First Aider (MHFA) network training 25 colleagues to support others in times of need and signpost them to additional support, promoted the importance of capturing diversity data and celebrating our diverse mix of colleagues and agreed our annual pay award with the engagement group. Ensuring our colleagues are always well informed too, we have a vibrant intranet with regular updates and signposting to useful information and we share monthly video and bi-annual business updates.

Attracting Talent: From July 2023 to March 2024 our Resourcing Team have made 134 (113FTE) candidate, permanent or fixed term, job offers, resulting in Connect Health having the lowest level of vacancies in over five years. Our recruitment strategy ensure we select the most suitable candidates to provide safe and exceptional care and support, tailored to the diverse needs of our patients. This is achieved through a rigorous screening and interview process, guided by our Company values, and aimed at assessing the clinical competencies of potential colleagues against our operational standards. To ensure the resilience of our workforce pipeline, we are increasingly prioritising recruiting individuals with potential, while maintaining a consistent and robust process to guarantee clinical competence.

Compliance: Maintaining continuous compliance throughout the entire colleague lifecycle is a primary focus. We actively implement ongoing enhancements in onboarding and risk management to guarantee pre-employment compliance for all new recruits joining Connect Health as well as ongoing checks through employment. Our optimisation efforts within iTrent (people system), coupled with exception reporting mechanisms, positions us strongly to mitigate risks and ensure compliance across all colleague categories thereby safeguarding the well-being of our patients.

Learning and Development: We invest significantly in CPD and provide a comprehensive range of development opportunities, designed to ensure we continue to provide positive outcomes for patients, innovation, growth, and development of our colleagues to be their best in their role and to progress their career through our career pathways. Our learning provision in 2023-24 has included:

Mandatory training: All colleagues have planned time to complete mandatory training, ensuring they are up to date with regulatory requirements. In 2023-24 all modules were reviewed and refreshed to ensure they met best practice, and we added additional modules (Patient Safety Incident Reporting (PSIRF) and Diversity training). 8,256 mandatory learning modules were completed by our workforce in 2023-24.

Management and leadership development: Broad suite of learning to ensure our leaders and managers are best equipped to support our colleagues:

1. **Senior Leadership Team:** Our 8 executives continued to receive external coaching, provided by independent expert professionals to enable them to develop their leadership skills and strategic thinking further.
2. **Leadership Conferences:** We held 2 conferences in the year with 29 of our senior leaders at each, to spend meaningful time together, enhance leadership skills, to collaborate around strategic thinking and development of patient services. Themes included: our company strategies, plans, our refreshed behaviours, and clinical priorities.

3. **Clinical Leaders:** We delivered our modular leadership training to our Clinical Delivery Leads (21 colleagues) across 5 modules, which focussed on empowering and compassionate leadership, creating accountability, high performing teams, communication skills, delegation, resilience, and diversity.
4. **Team Leader Programme:** 40 Team Leaders have accessed a blend of internal and external training, e-learning, face to face and coaching, supporting those new to role and helping others to grow in role, incorporating training on our values and equality, diversity, and inclusion.
5. **People Management:** We delivered a modular training course for our leaders and managers covering the spectrum of people management policies and practices from performance management through to managing attendance, we delivered 20 modules to 142 leaders and managers.
6. **Mentoring:** We created and delivered a new SLT mentoring programme, with each of our SLT mentoring colleagues. 36 colleagues accepted the mentoring opportunity, improving their personal skills and leadership skills. The programme was highly successful with 71% net promoter score, 15 promoters and 0 detractors.

Skills, competence and continuing professional development: Extensive suite of learning opportunities aligned to career pathways and our MDT approach:

1. **Academy:** We have an extensive online academy, accessible to all colleagues across our national workforce whether working remote, hybrid or site based, which includes e-learning modules for clinical competence, team manager and leadership skills. Colleagues have modules assigned or may freely access the academy for their own personal development. In 2023-24 we added further e-learning modules: leadership, patient conflict resolution, performance management, safeguarding and e-learning for health NHS modules.
2. **Induction:** In 2023-24 we added to the academy a digital induction pathway for new colleagues with interactive learning and videos to support their induction and help them understand our company values.
3. **Patient Care Team:** We have added a series of e-learning modules to the academy for our patient care team to help improve awareness of each of our services,
4. **Continuing Professional Development (CPD):** Our clinicians receive 5% of their working time dedicated to CPD. We also have a centralised training budget for CPD activities and personal development. The budget has enabled us to support 55 colleagues to attend a diverse range of training opportunities, such as webinars, conferences, university courses, for example: Acceptance and Commitment (ACT) training, evidence-based practice, injection therapy, clinical supervision, leadership, chartered management, counselling, etc.
5. **Basic Life Support:** Our colleagues receive face to face refresher basic life support training, every 3 years, in addition to the e-learning modules in the academy, 171 colleagues attended their refresher training in 2023-24.
6. **Pain modules:** We created and added to our academy 11 e-learning modules for pain, enabling all clinicians to understand how better to support patients, clinical pathways and improve their overall knowledge of pain.

Career Pathways: We support multiple programmes of development to upskill our colleague and our wider commitment to skill inequalities:

1. **Graduate Development Programme:** 12-week intensive training programme to support graduates to establish themselves into their role quickly, thus delivering patient services to expected standards. 27 colleagues on programme in 2023-24.
2. **Accelerated Development Programme:** Extending the GDP, our graduates then undertake the ADP programme over 12 months. They receive a blend of e-learning and face to face training, overlaid with observations and feedback by experienced clinical colleagues. At the end of the programme, colleagues are required to complete an exam and observed assessment of clinical competence, then becoming a Senior MSK Clinician on passing the

course. This enables us to provide improved patient services and accelerated development for our clinicians. 26 colleagues passed the programme in 2023-24.

3. **Apprenticeships:** Utilising our levy fund, we have supported our colleagues to enhance their career progression through a range of clinical and professional apprenticeships. 4 colleagues completed their ACP, Level 7 Advanced Clinical Practitioner and 2 support colleagues completed a Level 3 and 5 qualification, and 2 further support colleagues started their Level 5 and 7.





Section 3

Quality Developments & Improvement Priorities for 2023/2024



3.1 National Improvements and Developments

3.1.1 Operational Improvement

During 2023-24 we have continued to drive forwards continuous improvement at all levels across the business. Expanding our training and development across service and centralised business functions including our administrative operation (Patient Care Coordination Centre). Consequently, we have seen an improved uptake in purposeful activity from frontline colleagues to seize opportunities for improvement. For example, responding to soft intelligence through interactions with patients via our contact centre to improve the text messaging service we provide to patients to include more detail around appointment location information.

In parallel to our continuous improvement efforts across the business we have focussed on several key projects:

- Group Consultations
- Centralised provision of pain
- Utilisation and blocked time
- Revamp

Group Consultations:

A project to scope and implement a group-based model of care as the 1st appointment in service for patients likely to share similar symptoms and care needs. Fostering an environment that enables sharing of experience in a productive manner that improves patient outcomes.

Centralised provision of pain:

Due to our size and scale in the field of MSK-related persistent pain we are scoping the feasibility of running specific elements of care in a centralised manner. Essentially enabling patients from any part of the country in which we deliver services to come together online to receive their care. This is particularly relevant to often under-represented or seldom heard groups. It has been particularly successful for us in our first phase with our Urdu speaking Pain Management Programme.

Utilisation and blocked time:

A project scoping the business needs associated with diary planning and reporting for our c.500 clinicians to ensure we maximise the time they spend helping our patients and optimise the outcomes we achieve for the funding we receive from the NHS.

Revamp:

Supporting our long-term aspiration to continuously improve our administrative operation in recognition of its importance to good healthcare. This project is specifically targeting the ease and simplicity of use of the systems our admin teams use to coordinate patient care. As a large, national provider delivering different services in different places our systems can be complex. This project seeks to rationalise our process variations and make the system more intuitive, helpful, and easy to use for our colleagues. Consequently, making their working life a better experience whilst also reducing errors and mistakes.

3.1.2 Technology Innovation

Patient Portal

We successfully launched our patient portal in October 2023. This is an online portal built to NHS Digital's accessibility and security criteria which works with the NHS Login. As mentioned in section 1.7.2, we obtained DTAC, DCB0129 and DCB0160 certification for the patient portal, which showcases the high levels of usability and safety compliance it achieves.

This portal is unique to Connect Health, and allows patients to self-serve for the following functions:

- Appointment booking
- Digital self-referral (PhysioNow)
- Access to letters and care plans within 24 hours of being generated by the Clinician.
- To review and answer questionnaires that we use to gauge outcomes and satisfaction.
- Visibility and access to assigned exercise programmes.

Patient Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs)

After many years manually collecting PROMs at the start and end of a patients care episode, we took the decision to move to electronic collection now known as E-PROMs

There were several reasons behind the rationale including:

- Reduction of bias as patients are not completing them in the presence of the clinician
- Reducing the time demand on clinicians as this allows for more time in a consultation for clinical interactions
- The ability to collect data after the patient has been discharged from care, at 3 months and 12 months post discharge. This allows us to look at the longer-term outcomes of our care thus increasing data on our patient's health and wellbeing post treatment

At the same time as moving to electronic collection we increased the number we were collecting for both MSK and pain services. This data provides many ways to analyse the delivery of services taking relevant factors into account both to improve patient care, tackle inequality and direct services to where they are needed.

E-PROMS is housed within the patient portal and benefits from language translation technology and accessibility technology through ReciteMe. The outputs of the E-PROMs are also directly uploaded into the patient's clinical record within 24 hours.

Lexacom

Lexacom uses innovative speech recognition technology and can explain complex medical conditions in simple English at around 90 words per minute. Clinicians dictate using typical medical vocabulary, with the application translating it in real-time to lay language, so patients can better understand their clinical letters.

We successfully implemented Lexacom Echo in June 2023. It was originally trialled as we recognised that the time taken by clinicians to write up notes was significantly impacting on their working day and work-life balance.

As a result of the trial, we found a 17% reduction in the number of logins out of hours, and eight out of ten said that using Lexacom Echo allowed them to spend more time with their patients.

Further Information and Feedback

If you would like any of the following:

- to give us feedback on any aspect of this Quality Account
- a hard copy of this quality account
- a copy to read it in a different language
- to talk to someone about your experiences of our community MSK services
- to find out more about how to access our services

Please email access@connecthealth.co.uk or phone 0191 250 4580.

Central Office: The Light Box (Q2), Quorum Park, Benton Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE12 8EU.