Lay summary for Qualitative analysis of round-table discussions on the business case and procurement challenges for hospital electronic prescribing system.


Electronic prescribing (ePrescribing) systems could help to improve the quality of healthcare by making it more safe, efficient and cost effective. However, setting up an ePrescribing system in a healthcare organisation comes with challenges. ePrescribing systems can make big changes to the day-to-day work of the people who use the system. Also, the benefits of using an ePrescribing system might take a while to be seen. Organisations that want to set up an ePrescribing system need to make a strong business case to show why it is worthwhile investing in the new system.

Business cases describe the investment that is needed, the expected benefits and timeframes for setting up an ePrescribing system, and developing a business case is usually one of the first steps in the process of getting an ePrescribing system. Since there are a lot of unknowns before the new system is set up, it can often be difficult to write a strong business case.

This paper looks at ways to deal with the difficulties of writing a business case. We did this by discussing the matter of business cases with groups of people from all over England who are interested in or who have experience of setting up ePrescribing systems.

We found that business cases should recognise that an ePrescribing system would introduce changes to the whole organisation, not only to some parts of the organisation. To make a good business case, it was important for hospitals to create strong relationships with the supplier of the ePrescribing system. Hospitals should also look to other hospitals with more experience of ePrescribing systems for help. As the setting up process went on, there would likely be changes in the finances of the healthcare organisation so a business case should not be ‘set in stone’. Also, healthcare organisations should distinguish between what they really needed from their ePrescribing system and what they would like from it.

We conclude that it is important to have a business case before introducing an ePrescribing system. Since many English hospitals are thinking about setting up these systems, how to write good business cases is an important topic to discuss more. Hospitals in England should share lessons with each other, as well as looking to learn from experiences in other countries, when developing business cases for implementing ePrescribing systems.