Chapter XII

Feasibility of Joint Working in the Exchange and Sharing of Caller Information Between Ambulance, Fire and Police Services of Barfordshire

Steve Clarke, The University of Hull, UK

Brian Lehaney, Coventry University, UK

Huw Evans, University of Hull, UK

Abstract

This was a practical intervention in the UK, the objective of which was to undertake an examination of the current arrangements between Barfordshire Fire, Police and Ambulance Services for the sharing and exchange of caller information, taking into account technological potential and constraints, organisational issues, and geographical factors. The process followed was highly participative. The initial event was an open space session followed by later sessions exploring information technology

and human resource issues. For these two later events, interactive planning and critical systems heuristics were used. The most important outcome was that, whilst the extent to which the five organisations involved shared information and knowledge was very variable, there were no perceived barriers to this happening. Such sharing, despite considerable structural and cultural barriers, was seen to be feasible both organisationally and technically. The study further highlighted a need to more closely integrate operational and strategic planning in this area and to make more explicit use of known and tested methodologies to better enable participative dialogue.

Introduction

This chapter is based on a study into the feasibility of sharing caller information undertaken by the authors during 2000/2001. It involved Barfordshire Ambulance and Paramedic Service NHS Trust, Fire and Rescue Service, and Police Service, all in the UK, as participants. Whilst it might be construed that the only "healthcare group" included was the Ambulance and Paramedic Service, our study indicated that much of the work of all emergency services falls into or is related to healthcare. For example, fire crews and police frequently act as "first responders" to accidents in which they give support to ambulance and paramedic staff. Fire and police officers receive first aid training, and in some parts of the UK police are beginning to be trained to use defibrillators. The boundary between these three services as regards issues of healthcare is becoming, it would seem, ever more blurred.

The study began with all five services named above as participants. However, in practice, the participation of the Fire and Rescue Service was restricted to mostly Principal Officer level, and the project team has augmented information from that source by visits to similar organisations and IT suppliers, and by the collection of secondary data. There were good reasons for this lower level of involvement on the part of the Fire service, and these will be addressed later in the chapter.

Further, the outcome of the May 2000 Home Office Report (The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales, HM Fire Service Inspectorate, 2000), which came in the middle of the study, marked the effective withdrawal of Barfordshire Fire and Rescue Service from operational involvement in the study.

Specification of the Study

The objective, agreed between the consultants and a project board representing the emergency services, was to undertake an examination of the current arrangements between Barfordshire Fire, Police and Ambulance Services for the sharing and exchange of caller information. Specifically, we were charged with the task of exploring the feasibility of enhancing sharing and exchange of caller information between the above, taking into account technological potential and constraints; organisational issues; and

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