

## CHEERs to e-learning at BUPA Care Homes

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### *Two groups of trainees*

Blended learning is helping to reduce the costs, improve the effectiveness and quality, and reduce the inconvenience of training delivered to managers and administrators on a financial system used by BUPA Care Services.

The company, part of the international health and care company BUPA, operates 300 care homes across the UK. Many are in rural locations. Each home has managers and administrators – and each of them must be trained on the financial system, known as CHEERs, before they are allowed to use it “live”.

The care-home administrators are directly involved in the day-to-day use of CHEERs and so need to know the system “inside out”. Care-home managers, meanwhile, need at least an appreciation of how CHEERs operates.

### *Drawbacks of the traditional instructor-led course*

Traditionally, the two groups were trained in a five-day, instructor-led, residential course. But this strategy had a number of drawbacks:

- new administrators had to wait until one of these courses was being run and, consequently, were usually not able to carry out their full job duties as soon as they took up their new post;
- there was a wide range of knowledge about CHEERs, as well as a range of IT skills and work-based experience, among the trainees on each course;

- there was also a wide range of confidence levels among the trainees, based upon such things as their previous job experience and preferred learning style;
- trainees were lost to their jobs for at least five days – sometimes more when they were travelling to the course from the more remote parts of the UK – and this not only had staffing but also cost (travel and subsistence) implications;
- the trainees were not happy being away from their families and friends for five days or more;
- the costs of delivering the five-day course were high; and
- there were long waiting lists to attend these courses.

### ***The blended-learning solution***

In consultation with staff within “group” – BUPA’s name for its centralized functions – Tracy Fell-Smith, information-technology and finance trainer at BUPA Care Services, decided that these drawbacks could be overcome with the addition of e-learning materials to produce a blended approach to the training.

She and her team began searching for an e-learning developer to produce pre-course training materials that would not only ensure that all trainees were of a similar level of understanding before they took part in the classroom-delivered part of the training, but also that the trainees spent less time away from their families, friends and jobs.

After a tender-selection process, BUPA chose global e-learning producer Tata Interactive Systems (TIS) to develop the e-learning materials, on the basis of its cost-effectiveness, technical knowledge and approach.

“This was my first experience of developing e-learning,” confessed Tracy Fell-Smith, who supplied the subject-matter expertise for the e-learning materials, “and I was apprehensive about how the design and development process would work. But I needn’t have worried. TIS staff in the UK and India were extremely helpful and met all our requirements within budget. Moreover, they helped me to learn a great deal about e-learning. I enjoyed the whole experience!”

Access to the e-learning materials is through the internet-based BUPALearn learning-management system (LMS), which is externally hosted by SABA in the USA, and delivered via the Citrix environment, which is configured to point to the LMS and content server for users who have “intranet access only” rights.

Tracy Fell-Smith said:

Citrix technology was used to deploy a remote-access solution to overcome a limited bandwidth infrastructure. This, allied with the fact that some of the computers in the care homes are not as modern as they once were, provided a challenge for TIS: to get the e-learning materials to be accessed on every computer on the BUPA Care Services' network. It was a challenge that was met – and the resulting e-learning materials are proving highly popular with all the users in all our care homes, whatever their level of IT skills.

She added:

This latter factor is significant. People who work in care homes tend to come from a nursing background and have highly developed caring skills – as you would expect. However, their IT skills may not have been developed to the same standard, and the TIS developers had to take this into account when designing the e-learning materials.

TIS designed and developed the e-learning materials between December 2005 and March 2006. The first CHEERs e-learning module was delivered in April and the first blended-learning programme in May 2006. By the end of 2006, some 30 people had completed the e-learning programme and a further 67 had followed the complete blended-learning programme.

### ***The advantages of the blended approach***

This is enabling more people to become proficient in the CHEERs system sooner than under the traditional five-day training course.

The current blended-learning approach involves all trainees completing the e-learning materials and then achieving at least 80 per cent in an online assessment generated at the end of the e-learning programme. Having passed the assessment, the trainees attend a three-day training course.

Tracy Fell-Smith said:

This is proving popular. Administrators and managers can now learn in their own time – and need to be away only for a three-day course.

From the trainers' point of view, this is also much more efficient. Previously, we could schedule only one five-day course a month. Now, we can run more than one three-day course in a month, and so reduce waiting lists appreciably.

Moreover, new administrators can get access to the CHEERs system once they have satisfactorily completed the e-learning materials, rather than having to wait a month or more to go on a five-day course.

Tracy Fell-Smith, who revealed that there are even further benefits of this approach said:

And, when the trainees attend the three-day course, the trainers know that they all have a similar, basic knowledge of the CHEERs system. This means that the range of trainees' knowledge and experience is smaller and, thus, the trainers' job is made easier. In addition, knowing that they all have the same basic level of knowledge helps the trainees to be more confident when they attend the training course – especially in terms of their IT skills, since they will have already completed some e-learning.

The overall costs of providing CHEERs training have fallen by 40 per cent per delegate since the e-learning materials were introduced. Moreover, the number of courses that has been delivered in this period has increased by 300 per cent.

There is now a more timely delivery of training, since the e-learning materials are available at each desktop – and can act as an aide-memoire once the training has been completed. Moreover, BUPA can offer its care-home staff a range of tailored delivery options on the CHEERs system, to suit their individual needs and competencies. This learning can be fully tracked and monitored using the BUPALearn LMS.

In addition, the e-learning materials are helping to increase levels of learning retention, by creating a less stressful learning environment, enabling learners to learn the CHEERs basics at their own pace.

Tracy Fell-Smith concluded:

The overall goals of this project were to provide training to all care-home managers and administrators as close to their start date as possible, while also reducing the time they spent away from the care home to attend the instructor-led training. The facts and figures, as well as staff feedback, confirm that this is now happening.

### ***Points for thought***

- The fact that e-learning helped to ensure that all trainees had reached a similar level of understanding before they took part in the classroom-delivered part of the training helped to make the instructor-led training more effective.
- Since e-learning materials enable learners to get to grips with the basics of the CHEERs financial system at their own pace, and in a less stressful learning environment, knowledge retention is enhanced.
- The ready availability of e-learning materials at each desktop means that they can be used as an aide-memoire once the training has been completed.

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