e18 Innovation

South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Trust: Transforming Referral Processing with Intelligent Automation

South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Trust has dramatically improved patient pathways and staff experience by implementing SS&C Blue Prism intelligent automation to manage high referral volumes, particularly for suspected cancer cases. Partnering with e18 Innovation and SS&C Blue Prism, the Trust has transformed key administrative processes, ensuring faster clinical triage and better patient outcomes.

blueprism CERTIFIED PARTNER

Over 120,000 routine and urgent referrals processed annually

8,000+ hours of staff time saved per year

Significant decrease in overtime

100% compliance with 24-hour referral processing standard

Removal of pathway risks from the Trust Risk Register

ICS: North East and North Cumbria	**Trust Name:** South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust	**Department:** Outpatients and Cancer Services	**Process Name:** Referral Processing Automation

Challenge

Following the pandemic, the Trust saw a sustained increase in demand across most services. Cancer referrals in particular were rising sharply, requiring efficient and timely processing to maintain pathway performance and meet internal standards.

The process of transferring referrals from the national e-Referral Service (eRS) into the Trust's Electronic Patient Record (EPR) was highly manual, involving the opening and saving of multiple documents. This approach was resource-intensive and contributed to a growing administrative backlog, with routine referrals reaching volumes of approximately 900. The two-week-wait team faced mounting pressure to consistently meet internal targets for triage and booking turnaround times.

Staff across the scheduling team were managing a heavy workload made more difficult by system performance issues and repetitive manual tasks. Completion times were notably faster out-of-hours, highlighting inefficiencies in peak periods. Concurrently, higher-than-usual staff absence rates were affecting overall team capacity and contributing to reduced morale.

Solution

Implementation of four key automated workflows:

1. Moving Routine and Urgent Referrals from eRS into Meditech (Patient Administration System)
2. Moving Urgent Suspected Cancer referrals from eRS into Meditech
3. Fixing the Responsible Clinician in Meditech Appointments
4. Logging referrals and booking patients for the newly inaugurated Lung Cancer Screening Programme (LCSP)

The Trust established a robust business case and secured initial funding from their local Cancer Alliance. A cross-functional RPA governance group was created, including clinical safety representation to ensure patient well-being remained paramount throughout implementation.

Key Benefits of Intelligent Automation

Faster Patient Pathway Progression

Reliable Clinical Communications

Smarter Workforce Planning

Consistent Operational Performance

More Efficient Cancer Screening

Improved Staff Experience

What's Next?

Building on this success, the Trust plans to expand their automation programme to additional administrative processes across other departments. The team is exploring opportunities with the help of the e18 Innovation team to implement similar automations for other clinical pathways and is developing an internal capability to manage and enhance the existing automations, ensuring continuous improvement and maximum benefits.

"e18 Innovation has been a valued delivery partner throughout our automation journey. They were always there to help, and their in-depth understanding of RPA technology has supported our internal teams to implement solutions that have improved process effectiveness and efficiency."

Iain Smith – Associate Director of Planning and Business Development, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation

"At e18 Innovation, we're proud to support South Tyneside and Sunderland in transforming how referrals are managed across cancer and outpatient services. This programme is a powerful example of how automation can be deployed with clinical safety at its core to unlock meaningful benefits – faster patient pathways, empowered NHS teams, and sustainable improvements in performance. Our team is passionate about delivering digital solutions that work for frontline staff, and it's been a privilege to help the Trust build a scalable foundation for future innovation."

Louise Wall – Managing Director, e18 Innovation

e18 Innovation

Automate. Innovate. Elevate.

Leveraging Intelligent Automation to transform patient care and deliver a better staff experience in the NHS.

Get in touch