

A Visit to the doctors

The Alliance recently gave evidence to the Royal College of Physicians about services needed in primary and secondary care for those with a neurological condition. In a nutshell, we urged that doctors provide better information and support, particularly at diagnosis or when symptoms change. We proposed a rebalanced NHS workforce that includes more neuro-specialists: nurses, physios, psychological therapists, specialist GPs and consultants, with staff levels calculated from prevalence of need. We backed up our recommendations with some detailed data and gave examples of effective preventative activity suggesting how this could be audited and rewarded. The doctors were well aware that radical reform is needed to systems and the quality of care for those with a neurological condition who become hospitalised.

We argued for a fair approach to NHS priority-setting and funding, for a transformed central audit and reward system to ensure that all services receive full and consistent attention from commissioners and NHS boards, also that services be provided as close to home as possible. The Royal College listened and welcomed the concept of a nurse specialist for rare neurology conditions and were interested in the way the Alliance has demonstrated the cost and clinical effectiveness of such ideas. We plan to publish all the relevant data, recommendations and references in a section on our web site but first we will consult and welcome input from members and readers as this work is consolidated.

A well structured and trained workforce

A workshop was organised in September by the Local Implementation Team for Neurology, to identify local priorities to meet the National Service Framework for Long Term Neurological Conditions. The key priorities that emerged were the need for individuals and carers to be listened to, for early diagnosis by the right specialists, better provision and explanation of information, increased access to physical and psychological therapies, improved links between the NHS and social care, for holistic care when hospitalised and better procedures on leaving hospital. A raft of other recommendations also emerged. The solutions primarily lie in planning and creating the right NHS workforce structure and ensuring the right training. The Alliance will continue to press and justify all the key messages.

An alternative to pills

Berkshire West PCT will soon be able to deliver more 'talking therapies' to people suffering from depression and anxiety. 'Talking therapies', otherwise known as psychological therapies, cover a wide range of services that will enable people to talk through their problems. A total of 19 staff will be recruited and trained in a range of psychological therapies. Patient self referral will be encouraged to make it easy to seek help. Many readers will know only too well that a neurological condition increases the likelihood of anxiety or depression, so this alternative to pills is most welcome.

Marking Time

The Nation Service Framework (NSF) for Long Term Conditions is almost 4 years old. This 10-year strategy is to improve services for people with long-term neurological conditions, their families and carers. It describes 11 Quality Requirements (QRs) covering the different stages in coping with a long-term condition – from diagnosis through to end-of-life. In some Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) progress is being made to achieve the 11 QRs. South East Coast SHA has made 5 specific Long Term Pledges even setting target dates of 2010 for some of these. One pledge is to develop supported disease-specific clinical networks across the whole of healthcare, social care and the third sector; identifying, sharing and promoting best practice to improve the quality of care. Progress is also being made in the North East, where the Northern Areas Neurological Alliances have formed a strong partnership with local health bodies in a Neuroscience Network: important information for patients with a long-term neurological condition is now accessed via the Northern Area NA website www.na-na.org.uk. How ironic that South Central SHA has recently scrapped our regional Neuroscience Network, pending yet another non-vital, administrative reorganisation.

2009 Conference

Our next one-day conference will be on the subject of pain. 'Brains, Pains and Gains' will be held on July 9th in Arlington Arts at the Mary Hare School for the Deaf, near Newbury. The programme will cover many aspects of pain and how to cope. Once again we have been able to attract some superb speakers and we are indebted to pain consultant, Dr Stephen Allen, together with Professor Christine Collin and Penny Lilley for arranging the programme. This year we plan to hold taster sessions during the lunch break, with relaxation, physio and Tai Chi

on offer for those who wish to participate. Programmes and application forms will be sent out in March and full information will be available on our website.

Neural Community

The national Neurological Alliance has set up a new on-line community, the Neural Hub, for everyone working for better services for people with a neurological condition. You can reach the hub through the NA website www.neural.org.uk or directly at <http://neuralhub.ning.com>. The Hub is a place to post information or links that may be of interest to the neurological community, and to allow people to ask questions or initiate debates. Membership has to be approved by the Neurological Alliance, but is open to all those working in or with Alliance member organisations.

Diary dates to note

Our next Open Meeting is on Thursday March 5th when the speaker will be Michelle Wooff of the West Berkshire Local Involvement Network (LINK). LINK is an independent network of organisations and individuals representing the views of local people on how health and social care services are planned, developed and implemented. Further open meetings in 2009 will be held on May 7th, September 10th (AGM) and November 12th. Speakers are to be announced shortly. Open meetings, apart from the AGM, are held at St Joseph's Church Hall, Newbury, 1.45 for 2.00 pm. Free admission includes tea and biscuits.

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