

What about the NSF?

The decision to merge Berkshire West with Berkshire East PCT may seem justified in some quarters, but what will it do to transform the services needed to ensure that the standards set by the National Service Framework (NSF) for Long Term Neurological Conditions will be met by 2015? Surely the NSF is dead, we hear you cry? Actually, until the government announces what will replace it – and it surely cannot do any better – the NSF best describes what should be commissioned and available. The message going out remains: 'Let's get on and meet the standards defined in the NSF', noting that Berkshire is falling ever further behind the rest of the country. We look forward to publication of a draft neuro needs assessment which Berkshire West PCT has been working on and to implementation of a comprehensive programme of activity, equivalent to implementation of the NSF.

The priority is not to prioritise

We turn again to the way that the NHS fails to monitor the quality of neurology, prompted by the current round of activity to set priorities by a process known as 'Quality Accounts', in other words *ad hoc* dabbling! The Care Quality Commission, (CQC) continues to use the wrong approach to monitoring quality and improvement. Surely, if any NHS service is considered worth providing then its impact should be subject to regular audit to confirm that its quality is adequate and as intended? Otherwise who knows if the service is what it should be? WBNA focus groups have confirmed that several local NHS services deliver variable services with some described as 'out of touch'.

Gaps in services must be filled and adequately funded. Over-invested and under-invested services must be re-financed as a managed process. We need the 'administered' NHS to become the 'managed' NHS. A relatively small investment in a comprehensive and systematic NHS audit system would be more than offset by the efficiency savings arising.

The 'Quality Accounts' scheme is a development that exacerbates a longstanding problem of over- and under-prioritising, leading to patchy outcomes. A mixture of excessive and insufficient quality is costing the NHS an enormous amount. Quality Accounting will only rearrange molehills, not move mountain ranges.

For some time we have advocated the NHS ask 'would you recommend this service to your friends?' Feedback, properly analysed, should generate more than enough to trigger a high impact improvement programme across the NHS. We need NHS managers to look properly at underlying causes of reported problems, not simply implement superficial changes. We need solutions that will keep people out of hospital, rather than improving hospital services we do not need.

What neurology patients are entitled to includes:

- a slightly greater number of NHS services than at present,
- clear, agreed care pathways,
- a more efficient GP gatekeeper service, for accurate referral and prompt access,
- sensibly-funded services across the spectrum, in terms of quantity, safety and quality,

- some additional neuro-specialist clinicians,
- a comprehensive, fully-systematised, rolling quality improvement programme,
- an audit system that does not need to prioritise and that follows a full cycle of reviews,
- an across-the-board approach to financial management and value for all NHS services,
- some less focus on hospitals, operations and pharmacy,
- considerably more focus on quality of life and prevention activity.

We must move on from the current mix of pockets of excellence and poor services within the NHS.

Can we save our public services?

As we go to press, a last ditch attempt is being made to save public services in West Berkshire. WBC Executive Members will be meeting on 17th February to decide on how taxpayer funds should be spent during the next twelve months. Care workers, youth workers, families and politicians are all joining together to lobby WBC Executive Members. This lobby follows a previous protest in December 2010, which attracted around two hundred supporters.

Some of the services threatened with cuts include five day care facilities, five youth facilities and local bus transport. Other council services will face significant funding cuts, and 180 jobs could be lost to save £4.4m. We need to ask how the 'Big Society' will be able to fill these gaps.

WB Libraries: At Home Service

If you find it difficult to visit your library, possibly due to disability, age or you are a carer and cannot get to a library, then West Berks Library Service could deliver to your home. A member of the 'At Home Library Service' will visit you to discuss your requirements, what sort of books you enjoy

and whether you prefer large print books or perhaps audio books. Library visitors choose and deliver books, spoken word CDs or cassettes to your home at an arranged time and day, usually every three weeks. Library visitors are friendly volunteers who have been Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checked and enjoy a chat.

Perhaps you have a neighbour or friend who would be willing to visit Newbury Library for you? Once registered as a 'Good Neighbour' the Library's 'At Home' staff would assist them in choosing books for you and no overdue fines will be incurred. The only charges that might arise would be if you decide to order something not currently in the library. To find out more contact: At Home Library Service, Newbury Library, The Wharf, Newbury RG14 5AU Tel: 01635 519900

WBNA 2011 Conference

The Alliance is very grateful to the Henry Denman and Agneta Cook Charitable Trust for a generous donation of £5000. The committee has decided that this award will be used to support our 5th conference, scheduled for October 2011. The theme will be: *Rehabilitation, Prevention and Self-Help – Working together in the Community.*

Dates for your diary

Our next open meeting is on March 10th, the speaker is yet to be confirmed. Dates for further Open Meetings in 2011 are: May 12th, July 14th, September 15th (AGM) and November 17th. All meetings, except the AGM, will be held at St Joseph's Church Hall, Newbury, 1.45 for 2.00 pm.

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