



December 2014

PSNC Briefing 035/14: Update on the Health and Care Landscape

This briefing is part of a series issued regularly by PSNC to inform pharmacy contractors and LPCs of developments in the wider health and care landscape beyond community pharmacy. It builds on the Health & Care Review articles which are published on the PSNC website every week.

A&Es under extreme pressure as admissions reach record high

A&E departments are under immense pressure as admissions are at their highest since records began 10 years ago according to figures released from NHS England.

For the week ending 7 December, there were 436,229 individual attendances at A&E departments. This was nearly 4,000 more than the week before and over 20,000 more than this time last year.

This increase was reflected in the number of patients who were seen within four hours. The NHS's target is to see 95% of patients who are admitted, transferred or discharged within four hours; however, only 91.8% of patients last week were seen within this target, which is down on last year when the NHS managed to see 94.8%.

GP consultations for flu-like illnesses, respiratory tract infections and pneumonia have also risen over the last week according to Public Health England figures.

Injection of £250m by Government fails to clear waiting list backlog

Despite the Government injecting an extra £250m into the NHS in the summer to reduce the backlog of waiting lists, the number of patients waiting over 18 weeks for treatment has increased.

The *Health Services Journal (HSJ)* has reported that in October 2013, 169,907 patients were on waiting lists for longer than 18 weeks, but this has increased by 17% to 204,390 patients. The number of patients waiting over 52 weeks has also increased with 381 patients on this waiting list.

The growing waiting list has gone against the usual seasonal trend as waiting lists usually fall sharply between August and December. Last year there was a slight decrease but this year the list has continued to grow.

Online medical records can now be accessed by 21% of patients in England

NHS England has reported that over a fifth of patients in England are now able to access their medical records online. This time last year, only 2% of patients in England were able to view their medical records online; however, since September 2014, 21% of patients have been able to access their records.

There has also been increases in other online areas; the number of patients who are registered with GPs that allow appointments to be booked or cancelled online has risen to 91% and 88% of patients are registered with GPs that offer the option of ordering repeat prescriptions online. Both have risen from 66% at the same point in the previous year.

NHS England's Patient Online programme team will now focus on surgeries who aren't offering online services, to try to increase the number of surgeries who are offering their patients these services.

NHS England launches Commissioning for Carers

NHS England has launched [Commissioning for Carers: Principles and Resources to Support Young and Adult Carers](#) a practical tool, which highlights ten principles to help commissioners deliver the care and support carers need. This work forms part of NHS England's [Commitment to Carers](#), which was published earlier this year.

NHS England identified and developed the principles after working with carers, leading charities and partner organisations. The work also includes case studies, best practice and latest research that were collated at four regional evidence summits held across England.

This document is part of a suite of products that have been developed to help commissioners to deliver what carers say is important to them in ways that have been shown to work effectively and efficiently in practice.

Emergency admissions for older people predicted to rise over the next five years

A Department of Health (DH) funded study has predicted that emergency hospital admissions for older people will continue to rise over the next five years, despite Ministers' claims that the [Better Care Fund \(BCF\)](#) will reduce non-elective hospital activity.

The DH study [Understanding Emergency Hospital Admissions of Older People](#) has reviewed the emergency admissions of older people from previous years (2001-02 and 2012-13) and forecasts trends for the next Parliamentary period.

The study suggests that an individual patient's bed days may be reduced; however, overall spending on older peoples' emergency admissions will continue to rise due to technological advances pushing up the cost of care.

Stricter waiting times standards proposed under draft contract

NHS England has proposed stricter standards around waiting times in the draft standard contract for 2015-16. The *HSJ* has reported that financial penalties will be tougher on those hospitals that fail to meet the standards and restrictions will be placed on commissioners' freedom to waive penalties.

The proposals include increasing waiting time fines by 25% and that weekly reporting from hospital providers should become mandatory.

Commissioners will be expected to publish details of the fines on their websites to increase transparency, and instructions will be provided on how they should reinvest the money resulting from penalties.

BCF guidance published for 2015/16

The DH and the Department for Communities and Local Government have published an implementation plan for the BCF to cover the next two years.

The plan, [Better Care Fund – how it will work in 2015 to 2016](#), covers issues such as the legal and financial basis of the fund, conditions of access to the fund, assurance and approval process and payment for performance metrics.

The document should be read in conjunction with the [NHS Mandate](#).

A&E departments to trial employing pharmacists next year

The urgent and emergency care review, being led by NHS England, will conduct a national pilot in spring 2015, where pharmacists will be employed in A&E departments.

The national pilot will build on a pilot scheme in the West Midlands which focused on pharmacy triage, advanced clinical pharmacy training and clinically enhanced prescribing within the A&E department.

Plans approved to allocate over £1bn to underfunded CCGs

Over half of the £2bn extra NHS funding allocated by the Chancellor George Osborne in the autumn statement, will be used to bring underfunded CCGs closer to their target share of the NHS budget, the *HSJ* has reported.

NHS England has approved plans to allocate £1.1bn to CCGs in 2015, with £1.058bn being directed to underfunded CCGs. A paper that went to the NHS England board meeting explained that £350m of the remaining money will be used to cover winter pressures as there would be no “separate provision of seasonal resilience funding” in 2015-16 unlike this winter season where extra money to deal with winter pressures was made available from centrally held DH contingency funds.

The remaining funding will be used for additional increases to below target CCGs. The paper said this would mean that only 17 of England’s 211 CCGs would still be significantly underfunded at the end of 2015-16. Under the originally planned allocations, that figure would have been 34 CCGs.

If you have any queries on this PSNC Briefing or you require more information, please contact [Rosie Taylor, Pharmacy and NHS Policy Officer](#).