

Date: Wednesday 4 February 2004

Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly for Wales

Title: Review of the Interface between Health and Social Care Services – Welsh NHS Confederation evidence

Introduction

The Welsh NHS Confederation represents the organisations making up the NHS in Wales. All trusts and all local health boards in Wales are members. We are a part of the UK-wide NHS Confederation.

We are very grateful for the opportunity to present evidence to the committee. In gathering our evidence, we have drawn extensively on the views of our members.

We warmly welcome this review of the health and social care interface. Partnerships and relationships are central in the modern NHS and we think it is very important to look at how we can make them work effectively.

1 NHS commitment to health and social care partnership

A very clear message from across our membership is that the partnership agenda is seen as vital in delivering sustainable high-quality care to the people of Wales. There is a very real sense that the conditions are right for Wales to secure real improvements through effective partnership working. This is partly because the relatively small scale of Wales is conducive to working in partnership, but also because the close links which have been established in particular between LHBs and local authorities give an impetus to broader partnership working encompassing NHS trusts, and the private and voluntary sectors. This is a real opportunity to make a difference, and our members are committed to playing their part.

2 Many good examples of work across the health/social care interface

Our members have provided us with many examples of successful joint working between health and social care partners. Joint working can take a range of different forms, including joint funding for posts, and joint planning of services.

Areas covered by joint initiatives cited by members include:

- Older people
- Children with disabilities
- Learning disabilities
- SureStart
- Children's mental health
- Delayed transfers of care
- Over 75s assessment

These are co-ordinated in a range of different forums, such as partnership boards, health alliances, or health, social care and well-being strategy groups.

Many of the examples of partnership working have been facilitated by the National Assembly for Wales through dedicated funding streams such as Health Act flexibilities.

The evidence provided by our members shows clearly that partnership working across health and social care is beginning to take root. However, there is still some way to go before it becomes fully embedded in the working culture across all relevant organisations in Wales. The development of strong partnerships across the health and social care interface requires significant investment of resources, time and effort. It does though offer the potential for more effective service provision and more effective use of scarce resources.

3 LHBs and trusts need stability, headroom and freedom to develop links with social care

Organisational stability is a pre-requisite for effective working and consolidation of the partnership agenda. We support the Wanless Review's recommendation that "structural change is not the answer to the issues we have encountered" (2.20)

As well as stability, and in order to respond flexibly to the needs of their communities, NHS organisations require a degree of freedom and headroom if they are to develop at local level innovative ways of providing better care through partnership working.

While strategic leadership and guidance is essential, micro-management and over-regulation from the centre would hinder this process and stifle innovation.

Freedom and headroom are also essential to allow members to deal with the range of other important

initiatives under way at present, including Agenda for Change, new GMS and consultants' contracts, and the European Working Time Directive.

The above points apply across the NHS, but as relatively new organisations facing an enormous agenda, they are particularly true for LHBs, which need time and freedom to develop so that they can continue building effective partnerships.

4 Strategic direction and co-ordination at the centre to support joint working

There is a key role for the Welsh Assembly Government in setting out clear long-term strategic priorities for health and social care. The proposed five-year service and financial framework is welcomed. This, together with the framework for implementing the recommendations of the Wanless Review of Health and Social Care, is now critical. In this context, clarity by the Welsh Assembly Government on its health priorities is crucial so that local NHS and partner organisations can be clear about what is expected of them and about the areas of emphasis within which they should shape their plans.

But it is not enough simply to identify strategic priorities. These priorities must also be co-ordinated; the pieces of the jigsaw must join up. This point applies in two ways:

a) Connecting the health and social care jigsaw

Strategic priorities within the field of health and social care, the subject of this review, need to fit together coherently. This is particularly true of the Health, Social Care and Well-Being Strategies on the one hand, and the Wanless implementation plans on the other.

Planning is an area where greater co-ordination between relevant parts of the Welsh Assembly Government would be particularly welcome. Alignment of the planning timescales for health and local government is essential, to ensure that joint health and social care initiatives can be synchronised at local level.

b) Health and social care within the wider public policy jigsaw

Joining the pieces of the jigsaw within health and social care is necessary, but it is not sufficient. This is because making a real difference to health and well-being requires concerted action across the whole policy field, not just within health and social care. Members are finding for example that effective work to improve health requires partnership not only with social care but also with other areas of local authority activity. At an all-Wales strategic level, therefore, initiatives within health and social care need to be joined-up not only with each other but with the strategic direction set in other areas such as transport, housing and economic development.

Our members feel strongly that there is a need to ensure that both national and local health, social care and well-being strategies clearly fit with the overall direction of the local authority community strategy

process and other policy areas such as the children and young people's framework. Indeed, in our view there is a strong case for saying that the health social care and well-being strategy should not merely fit with these other strategic initiatives, but actually drive them.

5 Joint performance management to improve joint working

Establishing clear and co-ordinated strategic priorities is essential. However, ensuring that they are delivered requires a common framework across health and social care for managing performance.

Areas such as delayed transfers of care require effective joint planning and co-ordination of activity across health and social care. Members have also indicated their wish to:

- Develop joint commissioning
- Extend areas of joint service provision
- Develop common operational policies
- Establish pooled/joint budgets, with joint pump-priming money to test new services

Although there is already some activity in these areas at local level, it would be given a further major boost if all partners shared not only common strategic priorities but also a common set of targets and performance measures. We believe that this would help resolve many of the difficulties which arise from differences in priorities and accountabilities between health and local government. This was identified as a major barrier to successful joint working by our members.

We strongly support the balanced scorecard approach for performance management which is being introduced in the NHS. We would therefore like to see this approach extended to cover the whole health and social care field.

It is also important that inspection regimes for health and social care are co-ordinated and joined up and not working at cross-purposes.

6 "Common and shared information systems" across the health/social care interface

Information and IT is vital for safe, high-quality patient care. We have therefore warmly welcomed Informing Healthcare, with its emphasis on a corporate all-Wales approach for the NHS, and on the single electronic health record as the key element of the new information system.

But the information and IT infrastructure also needs to extend to social care, a point underlined by the Wanless Review's call for "common and shared information systems between health and social care" (4.63). Informing Social Care has been developed independently of Informing Healthcare, but it is essential that the two programmes are aligned and that the eventual outcome is a single pan-Wales information system which spans health and social care. As Lord Laming highlighted in his enquiry, the lack of such a system, and the insufficient importance given to proper sharing of information within and

between health and social care agencies, were key reasons why the authorities did not intervene in time to save Victoria Climbié.

A seamless health and social care system requires a seamless information and IT infrastructure. Without this, effective working across the health/social care interface will be seriously hampered.

Conclusion

We strongly support the partnership agenda and we welcome this review of the crucial interface between health and social care. We would be pleased to provide further information to the committee on any of the issues covered in this paper.