Supplementary written evidence submitted by Provider Public Health Network (PHP0118)

Public Health in the NHS

This further response follows up on the paper ‘Healthcare Providers and Public Health’, written by the Provider Public Health network, submitted to the enquiry in December 2015.

Introduction

Improving health and reducing health inequalities should be core business for every health and social care commissioner and provider. However, one effect of the Health and Social Care Act has been to diminish the influence of Public Health within the NHS, which is now much more variable than it formerly was. While in some areas CCG commissioners are drawing on local Healthcare Public Health advice, and a number of Trusts have their own Public Health capacity and expertise, this is very dependent on local circumstances and individuals and these organisations are in a minority across the NHS.

Since the original call for evidence to the Committee, the NHS Planning guidance has provided a context and framework within which the case for strengthening the NHS’s role in Public Health has become incontestable. This paper identifies some changes which are required to enable this to happen.

The benefits of a greater role for the NHS in Public Health

The paper ‘Healthcare Providers and Public Health’ sets out the potential benefits which healthcare Providers can deliver for Public Health, as well as the added value to healthcare Providers of having Public Health within their organisation.

In summary the Public Health roles of Healthcare Providers are identified as:

- Interventions to improve the health of patients, staff and the public

- A strategic approach to Public Health with policies and a culture which encompass health improvement and prevention as core business, and support clinical leaders as champions of Public Health

- Planning and delivering high value services to meet the needs of the whole population, in partnership with other local health and social care organisations, and supporting clinical leaders as champions of value in healthcare

- Robust arrangements for health protection, working collaboratively with other organisations to protect health
• A role in the local community supporting local employment and procurement of goods and services, and environmental sustainability

In addition, Public Health expertise can add value to Providers in the following areas:

• Improving service quality and safety and reducing mortality
• Supporting work on clinical governance and managing risk
• Improving financial management and value for money through expertise in health economics and improving value
• Producing and interpreting evidence and intelligence to support strategic planning
• Working with clinicians to improve service outcomes and evaluate the impact of changes
• Training, talent management and professional leadership in Public health

Public Health and place-based planning in the NHS

Place-based planning now provides scope not only for improved integration and collaboration to improve health and social care, but to improve population health.

In order for this to happen, the following are needed:

• Effective system leadership, by individuals who understand and value the potential benefits to population health and can engage the partners within their system in collaborative action to improve Public Health
• Identified Board-level responsibility for and expertise in Public Health within each commissioning and provider organisation.
• Developing all providers as Public Health organisations, for example using a framework like the WHO Health Promoting Hospital standards, updated and rebranded for the 21st century. The standards should encompass the health of staff, visitors and patients, a system-wide approach to population health and healthcare, and the organisation’s impact on the environment and their role in their community.
• Stronger incentives for the effective collaboration which is the ambition of the NHS Planning guidance
• Shared responsibility and stronger levers across the system for improving public health outcomes and for joint approaches to population healthcare.
• Support to share resources, break down the barriers to access to the data which systems need, and for proper evaluation.
• A culture promoting partnership and collaboration rather than competition
• Recognition that sufficient time and resources will need to be invested now to deliver future benefits for the whole population
Conclusions

Public Health leadership within and by the NHS could deliver significant benefits to population health and healthcare, particularly within the framework of place-based planning set out in the new NHS Planning guidance. However this requires recognition that Public Health functions should be at the core of organisations and systems which have improving health at their heart, and a strengthening of the NHS’s Public Health capacity, roles and responsibilities.

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