Implementation ball gets rolling with announcement of pilots

Call for participants in Steele review pilots circulated by the Department of Health as implementation programme gets into action

The implementation of the recommendations put forward last year by the Steele Review into NHS dental provision has gathered momentum with a call for interested parties to take part in pilot schemes and the formation of an implementation group to oversee the delivery of the recommendations.

In a letter sent out to dental professionals and Primary Care Trusts, Chief Dr Barry Cockcroft called for expressions of interest to come forward for participation in two phases of piloting.

We are now asking for expressions of interest in taking part in piloting. Piloting will initially take place in two waves. We are designing a number of “whole system” options, which we aim to pilot from this autumn. We are also looking to launch a small first wave of pioneer pilots – to begin this April.

The whole system pilots will involve practice or PCT level pilot schemes that will run for two years. They will use a range of blended contracts, each with a different mix of remuneration for capitation, quality and activity, which is at the heart of the Steele recommendations. The pilots will be monitored and evaluated centrally to assess the impact on the quality of patient care, the flow of money for PCTs and providers, the impact on the skill mix and the relative effectiveness of each of the contract options.

More immediately, we are looking to identify pioneer pilots to begin at the start of the coming financial year. We are aware that many PCTs are already operating blended contracts, along the lines envisaged in the Steele review, or are testing, or planning to test in contracts, discrete aspects of the thinking set out in the review. We are inviting expressions of interest from PCTs with such schemes in taking part in a “pioneer” wave.

Expressions of interest for piloting will need to be co-ordinated and approved by PCTs. We have written today to invite volunteers from PCTs in being part of the first wave of pilots. If you are a contract holder and would like your practice(s) to be considered for piloting the first step is to contact your PCT and, if they are content, they will put forward an expression of interest to the Department. PCTs have been given a deadline for initial expressions of interest for the autumn pilots of 19 March 2010.

The deadline for the first wave of pilots passed last week; however those who want to find out more about the second wave of piloting are requested to contact their PCT to register interest.

In more news, it has been announced that Prof Steele has joined the implementation group which will oversee the delivery of the recommendations he proposed in the review.

Prof Steele will join Dr Cockcroft and John Milne, Chair of the General Dental Practice Committee on the board.

Commenting on the news of his involvement, Prof Steele said: “During the Review of NHS Dental Services I worked extensively with patients, dental professionals and the wider NHS to identify ways in which the NHS could improve and offer all patients the highest standard of care. The pilots will test the recommendations important to ensure any changes made work for both patients and the NHS.

“I am pleased to have the opportunity to see through the recommendations of my final report as they are rolled out across the NHS. It is important that we improve preventative services to keep people healthy as well as making sure they have access to the best possible care when they need it.”