White Paper reshapes NHS

PCTs and SHAs scrapped as GPs take over healthcare; dentistry reverts to centralised control by NHS Commissioning Board

The Coalition Government has set out its reforms for the NHS in a White Paper entitled Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS.

In a radical shakeup of the way the NHS is currently run, the White Paper proposes that most of the mainstream health-care services currently looked after by Primary Care Trusts will become the responsibility of GP Consortia, which will assess and commission services.

Dentistry will not fall under this remit however, as there will be an independent NHS Commissioning Board who will be responsible for services such as pharmacy and ophthalmology as well as dentistry. The White Paper will see a return to centralised control for dental services, as PCTs and SHAs will fall by the wayside in the proposed reforms.

Consistency

Commenting on the proposals, Health Minister, Lord Howie, said: “The White Paper proposes that a new NHS Commissioning Board should take over from PCTs the responsibility for commissioning dentistry in order to improve the quality of care for patients and consistency of commissioning.

“The transition to the new system will require careful management at every stage. This will be a challenge, but I have every confidence in the NHS’s ability to manage this successfully.

“We recently published a consultation seeking views on commissioning for patients and the implementation of the NHS Commissioning Board and now we want to hear the views of healthcare professionals on how the new system should work.”

The Way Forward

The White Paper also reiterates the Coalition Government’s commitment to introduce a new dentistry contract following consultation and trials. This will be designed in the context of the new commissioning arrangements. I am having ongoing meetings with key representatives of the profession to discuss the way forward.”

Impact

Peter Bateman, chair of the British Dental Association’s Safari Dentists Committee, commented on the potential impact of the White Paper for salaried dental services. He said: “It is essential that specialist care dentistry and other salaried dental services are included in same dental commissioning arrangements as for general practice otherwise there is a risk that the budget for community services could be lost to dentistry.”

The NHS will see widespread reform if the White Paper becomes reality

Dental associations gave the White Paper a cautious welcome. General Dental Practice Committee (GDPC) chair Dr John Milne said: “The White Paper does not address dental services in detail nor exactly what the implications of the new framework will be, but it is promising to see that primary care dentistry will be commissioned by a new NHS Board. Safeguarding dental services, whether provided by family practices or the salaried and specialist services, is paramount. It is reassuring that the government has reiter- ated its pledge to pilot changes to the dental contract and we are urging the Minister to continue developing the pilots testing out the recommendations in the Steele report.”

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