Integrated Care Pathways

Glenys Bridges looks at patient needs

All dental care providers are required to place patient's needs at the centre of dental care provision. This article looks at ways to develop robust patient focused procedures to enable them to work as a team. Integrated care pathways can be used to define practical procedures for the delivery of NHS care, which enables NHS practices to create personal care plans for each patient, within the parameters of a standardised patient journey.

Integrated Pathways have developed in line with the required outcomes that have been stipulated in numerous dental regulations since ‘Options for Change’. It is a tool for ensuring continuous improvement, whilst embedding patients’ wellbeing at the core of practice culture. In the past if a practice appeared orderly and caring, it would have been assumed to be providing high quality care. Today’s regulators need to see evidence of patient focused, structured and systematic dental care provision.

Working to the Pathways’ Standards adds considerable organisational and financial burdens upon Registered Providers and Managers. Time they spend ensuring that Quality Management processes are in place reduces the time they have left to spend on other work tasks. Only when dental professionals working together as a team and share the range of tasks form the patient journey, can care pathways really be integrated.

The origin of UK Care Pathways is the Department of Health’s (DOH) strategic objectives for public health, the NHS and social care in England. Their purpose is to improve England’s health and wellbeing, so as to secure better health, better care, and better value for all.

The vision for health and social care is focused around five key priorities:

1. A patient-led NHS
2. Better health outcomes
3. More autonomous and accountable systems
4. Improved public health
5. Reforms to long-term and social care

The objective is to find the best way to develop, support and mobilise the health and social care systems to deliver improvements for patients and the public. Delivery support includes:

- Performance monitoring and evaluation
- Managerial and professional leadership for external groups
- Building capacity and capability
- Ensuring value for money

The Health and Social Care Act 2008 provides the legal framework to develop the

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standards care providers must meet to secure the required standards of quality and safety of care. Under the terms of the Health and Social Care Act 2008, regulators have been appointed in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure local needs are accounted for in the development of care standards.

The CQC makes sure that care providers meet essential standards of quality and safety. It has a wide range of enforcement powers to take action on behalf of people who use services, if services are assessed as being considered unacceptably poor.

The CQC’s aim is to make sure:
• Improving care is provided for everyone
• Voices of people who use health and adult social care services are heard, by asking people to share their experiences of care services. In some cases patients and their carers work alongside inspectors to provide a user’s view of services.
• Users’ views are at the heart of its reports and reviews.

All leading to the improvement of the quality of care provided; and decreased risk of complaints and litigation.

As a practical tool, Care Pathways lead to the development of Personal Care Plans for each patient. The plan requires input from dental professionals across the team including administrators, to meet the requirements shown in the following diagram for new and returning NHS and non-NHS patients.

The end result of following these pathways is intended to be improved efficiency and better use of resources. The aim is to use the best practices to standardise the patient journey, whilst at the same time providing individualised patient care and the inclusion of patients in decision-making processes. This in turn requires dental teams to provide opportunities for patients to raise patients’ dental IQs so that they can make informed decisions.

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About the author

Gleny Bridges is an experienced management trainer and assessor with 20 years experience of working with General Dental Practitioners and their teams. In addition, she has expertise and qualifications in Counselling and Life Coaching. Her first book Dental Practice Management and Reception was published in 2006 her second book Dental Management in Practice was published during 2012.