Integrated Care Pathways

Glenys Bridges looks at patient needs

A ll 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 Pathway’s 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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