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Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Bulletin No. 45 / 5 November 2010

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Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Information

Date of next HOSC meeting: Friday 26 November 2010, 10.00 am .

Location: Council Chamber, Sessions House.

Main Agenda Items:

- 1) Primary Angioplasty
- 2) Community Mental Health Services.

Health in Kent

NHS West Kent PCT has announced a reduction in funding for IVF and low priority procedures this year in order to tackle rising acute activity, which risks a £40m overspend.

NHS West Kent wrote to GPs at the start of the week asking them to defer referrals for gender reassignment, IVF and surgery for the obese until April. In addition, GPs have also been asked to consider where treatment can be more appropriately provided in the community rather than in hospital.

The decision follows similar actions by other PCTs including NHS Yorkshire and York, NHS Warwickshire and NHS Warrington.

See:

[Kent PCT to delay referrals in order to dodge overspend](#)

Department of Health

The Department of Health (DOH) has confirmed that 1st November 2010 marks the start of the three month notice period before 24 more primary care trusts (PCTs) will be able to authorise their prescribers to operate Release 2 of the Electronic Prescription Service.

The addition of 24 PCTs, which includes NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent will bring the total number of authorised PCTs to 51 from 1 February 2011. The PCTs will be listed in The Primary Medical Services (Electronic Prescription Service Authorisation) Directions 2008 as amended (the 'EPS Authorisation Directions') as those able to authorise their primary medical services contractors or any practice established by the PCT to use Release 2 of the Electronic Prescription Service, from 1 February 2011, following a three month notice period.

See:

[PCTs to be added to the EPS Authorisation Directions from 1 February 2011](#)
[Electronic Prescription Service](#)

The Local Government Information Unit (LgiU) was commissioned by the Department of Health to carry out an independent study of the role of local government in supporting health improvement and tackling health inequalities, and to analyse the structure of support needed locally to deliver effective action for communities.

The final report '[All's well that ends well?: local government leading on health improvement](#)' is the final report of that study. The report builds on the work of the Marmot Review in establishing the importance of local activity in tackling the social determinants of health.

Government

The final report of the steering group, established to review the methodology for calculating the hospital standardised mortality ratio (HSMR) has been published.

The report provides the recommendations from the Steering Group for onward submission to the National Quality Board for the adoption of an NHS-owned summary indicator for mortality – the Summary Hospital-Level Mortality Indicator (the SHMI).

For all the relevant reports:

See:

[National review of hospital standardised mortality ratios \(HSMR\)](#)
[National Quality Board advice and recommendations](#)

Earl Howe, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health championed the Government's vision for high-quality health services through greater collaborative working and patient involvement.

The Minister was speaking at the Parliamentary reception for the all-party Parliamentary group on heart disease, hosted by the British Heart Foundation (BHF) in partnership with the Cardio and Vascular Coalition (CVC).

The minister commended the joined-up working of the CVC in raising the profile of cardiac and vascular diseases as a whole, and noted the importance of co-ordinated care and the ability of people to take ownership of their own conditions.

See:

[A patient-centric approach](#)

Parliament

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday 2nd November 2010

Debates:

[Mental Health Care](#)

[Preventative Health Care](#)

[StartHere](#)

[Specialist Children's Hospitals](#)

[Cancer Survival Rates](#)

[Gp Commissioning \(Financial Information\)](#)

[Gp Revalidation](#)

[Neuromuscular Care](#)

[Cancer Treatment \(Waiting Times\)](#)

[Nhs Administrative Costs](#)

[Dementia Research](#)

[Hereditary Breast Cancer Helpline](#)

[Preventative Health Care](#)

[Pfi Contracts](#)

[Diagnostic Tests \(Cancer\)](#)

[Health](#)

[Termination Of Pregnancy \(Information Provided\)](#)

Wednesday 3rd November 2010.

Westminster Hall:

[Speech Therapy Services \(Children\)](#)

HOUSE OF LORDS

Wednesday 3rd November 2010

Debates:

[Coroners: terminally ill patients: question](#)

[Health: NICE: question](#)

Wednesday 4th November 2010

Debates:

[Diabetes: question](#)

HOUSE OF COMMONS SELECT COMMITTEES

The Savings Accounts and Health in Pregnancy Bill Committee has had a session of oral evidence.

The Bill, which repeals the legislation providing for the establishment of a Saving Gateway scheme, which was to be a tax-free cash saving account available to people in receipt of qualifying social security or tax credit awards, will process through the Committee stage during the next week.

See:

[Savings Accounts and Health in Pregnancy Grant Bill Committee announce programme](#)

The Commons Health Committee has had a session of oral evidence with GP representatives and a panel of GPs with differing perspectives.

The committee will continue the inquiry into the intentions of the Coalition Government regarding the implementation of changes to commissioning in the NHS through implementation of policies outlined in the recent White Paper.

Issues of particular interest include proposals to replace Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) with GP commissioning consortia, the challenges thrown up by transition to such a system, the role of the NHS Commissioning Board and the impact of these changes upon patient choice.

See:

[MPs ask doctors about government plans for the NHS](#)

The House of Commons Health Select Committee has held the second oral evidence session for its inquiry into how the financial squeeze will affect NHS and adult social care services.

The Health Committee asked representatives of NHS organisations and local authorities about the likely impacts of the recent spending review settlement on service provision and efforts to improve efficiency and productivity.

See:

[MPs take further evidence on health-related public expenditure](#)

The House of Commons Select Committee on Public Accounts has published ‘Tackling inequalities in life expectancy in areas with the worst health and deprivation’ which examined, on the basis of evidence from the Department of Health (DOH) why the DOH had failed to meet its health inequalities target, the role of GPs, and the lessons of this for the new NHS.

The report [‘Tackling inequalities in life expectancy in areas with the worst health and deprivation’](#) argues that although inequalities in health outcomes between the most affluent and disadvantaged members of society are longstanding, deep-seated and have proved difficult to change, in 1997, the Government put tackling health inequalities at the heart of its health agenda and subsequently published a number of policy documents and related targets.

See:

[Tackling inequalities in life expectancy in areas with the worst health and deprivation](#)

Care Quality Commission

At the National Children and Adult Services conference yesterday Health Minister Paul Burstow announced that the Government would be reviewing regulation and assessment and that there would no longer be an annual CQC assessment of local authorities.

Assessments will, in the future, be led more by the sector, and local authorities will be charged with driving improvement to services.

See:

[CQC Press Release](#)

Other Health Information

A new study co-written by David Nutt says that alcohol is the most dangerous drug in the United Kingdom,

Mr Nutt, formerly chief drugs adviser to the Government, has published a study in the Lancet which looks at 20 drugs, measuring the harm they do to individuals and society. Heroin, crack cocaine, and methylamphetamine were identified as the most dangerous drugs for users, but taking into account addiction and the cost to the economy and communities, alcohol emerged as the most harmful.

The study's authors claim that the current drugs classification scheme has "little relation to the evidence of harm". It also criticised the decision to classify mephedrone as a Class B drug, and found that LSD and ecstasy were among the least damaging drugs.

See:

['Alcohol more harmful than heroin says Nutt'](#)

['Alcohol more harmful than heroin or crack'](#)

The Department for Education (DFE) has released a consultation 'Arrangements for Placement of Children by Voluntary Organisations and Others (England) Regulations 2011' which is about consolidating and replacing old regulations about the placement and case review of children other than looked after children, by various voluntary organisations or in children's homes.

The new regulations are required because previous regulations, which covered both looked after children and children who are not looked after, are being revoked or amended, and DFE need to consolidate the arrangements which will apply to placement of children who are not looked after.

For all the relevant documents:

See:

[Arrangements for Placement of Children by Voluntary Organisations and Others \(England\) Regulations 2011](#)

Consultation period: Monday 1 November 2010 - Monday 24 January 2011

Local Government Improvement and Development has released a report which highlights how some of the regional front line initiatives deliver efficiency in health and social care, whilst improving the lives of service users.

The report '[Pushing the boundaries of social care: innovation on the front line](#)' illustrates examples from the Local Innovation Award (LIA) which show how, in the present period of austerity, throughout the public sector, people working at the front line are continuously adapting to meet everyday challenges head on and creating radical solutions to address them.

A new report from the British Academy argues that the sharp rise in work stress in Britain is becoming a major social problem in the current economic crisis, and cites a reported increase of 4 – 6% during the past year in work stressors like workload, job security and organisational change.

The report [‘Stress at work’](#) argues that even employees who have escaped loss of employment during the economic downturn are suffering under the pressure of company downsizing and restructuring. In addition, employers are placing tighter controls on sick leave* but this can lead to ‘presenteeism’ or attending work in poor health because of the pressure to do so. Such activity, the report suggests, can lead to more frequent long-term health problems for the workforce and end up costing more to society.

The report argues that the public sector in particular has felt the strain, with over a quarter of employees reporting an increase in their hours, a rise of 7% since the recession, compared to a 2% rise in the private sector. In addition, job insecurity has also increased considerably in the public sector with almost a fifth of workers thinking they are ‘likely’ to lose their jobs, a rise of 11 % since spring 2009.

See:

[Stretched to breaking point](#)

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has released a report which argues that childhood experiences are crucial to forming future drinking habits.

The report [‘Pre-teens learning about alcohol: drinking and family contexts’](#) argues that much emphasis has been placed on understanding the impact of problem drinking within the family, yet much less is known about how children learn about alcohol in so-called ‘ordinary families’.

The study found that:

- Children in the 7-12 age bracket have a fairly sophisticated knowledge of alcohol and its effects.
- The home is an important source of learning about alcohol and young children anticipate modelling their future behaviour on parents’ drinking styles.
- Parents often have limited belief in their ability to teach children to drink responsibly, in the face of external pressures.

See also:

[Pre-teens learning about alcohol: drinking and family contexts: executive summary](#)

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has also released a study relating to alcohol consumption and family life.

The study [‘Family life and alcohol consumption: a study of the transmission of drinking practices’](#) examined how parents teach young children in the 5yrs to 12yrs age group about alcohol.

The study explored parental attitudes towards alcohol, and family drinking practices, using a national survey and in-depth case studies, and found that:-

- Parents are the most important influence on young children's attitudes to alcohol.
- Parents are largely successful at conveying the social pleasures and risks of drinking at home and the message that alcohol should be consumed in moderation.
- There are gaps in what children learn from home such as the health consequences of drinking and the potential risks of drinking outside the home.

See also:

[Alcohol consumption and family life: summary](#)

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) biennial survey of safety representatives indicates that stress, bullying and harassment, back strains, slips, trips and falls, and overwork top the list of workers’ safety concerns.

The TUC argue that the 2010 survey found that stress is the most common health and safety problem at work, and that nearly two thirds or 63% of surveyed representatives argues that

stress is in the top five of problems faced by the workforces they represent. In addition almost a quarter, or 27% pick out stress as the hazard at work that most concerns them.

In addition, the TUC survey indicated that stress is most often found in the public than in the private sector, with 68 % of public sector union representatives arguing that is a problem compared to 54 % in the private sector.

See:

[Focus on Health and Safety: trade union trends survey: TUC biennial survey of safety reps 2010](#)
[Stress tops workers' safety concerns and spending cuts will make it worse](#)

The NHS Confederation has released a briefing which provides an overview of the health topics funded by the EU.

The briefing '[Collaboration beyond borders: European funding opportunities for the NHS](#)' discusses the benefits of engaging with an EU programme and gives advice on how NHS organisations can access these opportunities.

The NHS Confederation has released a briefing looks at how best to interpret hospital standardised mortality ration (HSMRs)

HSMRs are the difference between the actual number of deaths in hospitals and the number that would be expected. The briefing '[Hospital standardised mortality ratios: their uses and abuses](#)' looks at how best to interpret HSMRs and how far they can be used as a reliable indicator of hospital quality by organisations, patients, commissioners, the media and the public.

The NHS Confederation, in partnership with Combat Stress, has released a briefing on improving the availability of appropriate mental health services for military veterans, particularly given the British military action in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Improving the support available for veterans with mental health needs was a specific commitment in the Coalition government agreement earlier this year, and the briefing '[Improving mental health services for veterans](#)' first describes the scale of the issue and the common barriers to veterans accessing the services they need, and then outlines the broader policy context and looks at some of the recent initiatives aimed at improving services.

Jo Webber, the NHS Confederation deputy director of policy is speaking at the Children and Adult Services Conference to warn that the shunting of costs between the NHS and local government would be a 'totally inadequate' response to the funding pressures facing health and social care.

At the conference, Ms. Webber called for the NHS and local government to join forces and change services in a bid to get 'the maximum bang for every buck on behalf of service users.'

See:

[Partnership the answer to funding pressures](#)
[Partnership not cost shunting is the answer to funding pressures](#)

The LGA has produced a discussion paper on the future of adult social care which says that the system needs to be transformed and more should be done to allow those in need of care to stay in their own homes.

Local councils should build on relationships with community groups and health professionals so that those in need of care do not just get sent to nursing homes and day centres, the cost of which councils will no longer be able to bear.

See:

[LGA Press Release](#)

A serious case review has found that Little Teds, the Plymouth nursery where a worker sexually abused children 'provided an ideal environment' for the abuse.

The Plymouth Childrens Board report into the abuse found that a lack of formal staff supervision was partly to blame but also detailed a number of lessons learnt from the abuse, including the danger of mobile phones within day care settings, and an urgent need to develop effective staff supervision.

See:

[Serious Case Review Overview Report: executive summary in respect of](#)

[Nursery Z. March 2010](#)

[Little Ted's was 'ideal' place for Vanessa George abuse](#)

Five years after the introduction of the Foundation Programme for trainee doctors, Medical Education England (MEE) has released a review which evaluates trainees' roles in the two-year foundation programme and how they are regulated.

The report found that the Foundation Programme has many strengths and provides a critical interface between medical school and medical practice for trainee doctors. But there were also a number of concerns around design, content, safety and quality. The two principal findings are that:

- the length of the programme should remain unchanged at two years but this should be reviewed in 2015 when the impact of the General Medical Council (GMC) recommendations in Tomorrow's Doctors will be clearer.
- there was concern about evidence presented regarding variation in the deployment and supervision of trainees with some saying they had been asked to practise beyond their level of competence.

See:

[Foundation for excellence: an evaluation of the Foundation Programme](#)

[Medical Foundation Programme report calls for better supervision of trainee doctors](#)

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