



21 April 2009

## **Kent LINK's commentary on the Annual Health Check in Kent and Medway 2008 / 2009**

### **Introduction**

In October last year Kent & Medway Networks, the support organisation for the Kent Local Involvement Network (LINK), was approached by the then Healthcare Commission to discuss what contribution the LINK could make towards the Annual Health Check for the period 2008 / 2009. The then Healthcare Commission, now the Care Quality Commission (CQC), uses the Annual Health Check to:

- measure the performance and standards of all NHS Trusts throughout England,
- and provides an annual rating of their performance.

The process requires NHS Trusts to self declare against seven core standards. Only a proportion of NHS Trusts are visited as part of this process, so, to provide some external validation, third party commentaries are invited from key community groups, such as local authority Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and now LINKs. However, it was recognised that as LINKs were not operational for the whole of the period under review, which is 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009, they may not be in a position to contribute this year.

At the Kent LINK's launch on 3 December 2008, when it became a legal entity, it was agreed that some attempt should be made, in the time remaining, to give the community of Kent an opportunity to participate.

### **Method**

As the LINK had not accumulated a body of work on which it could draw, it was agreed that it should contact a range of voluntary sector organisations representing various groups that may have members with experience of using Kent's NHS during the period under review. It was thought that the best method would be to support voluntary sector organisations in seeking the views of their members and for them to return a collective view. Alternatively, the LINK could use the community and voluntary sector to circulate a questionnaire to be returned to the LINK for analysis. Individuals were given the opportunity to respond via an on-line questionnaire or by completing a paper version. It turned out that a combination of collective and individual responses have contributed towards the LINK's commentary.

The response was:

- Completed or partially completed on-line questionnaires - Kent: 43
- Completed or partially completed paper questionnaires - Kent: 19
- Completed or partially completed on-line questionnaires - Medway: 19
- Completed or partially completed paper questionnaires - Medway: 49

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It had not been possible to carry out a pilot survey and it soon became apparent that both the on-line questionnaire and paper form was not that user friendly. The on-line version clearly caused difficulties as a number of organisations started the form and did not complete. We attempted to go back to those organisations with some limited success.

An easy to read version of the questionnaire was commissioned, which seemed to work better, although again with a lack of piloting, problems were revealed when it went live.

It was decided to combine Kent and Medway surveys in view of the cross boundary flows of patients throughout the County. Medway starting later benefited from some of the difficulties experienced in Kent being ironed out and hence, proportionately, a much better response was achieved.

Lessons have been learnt and whilst it will not be possible to use this piece of work for any statistical purposes, issues have come to the fore, as indicated by the following findings.

## **Findings**

Respondents' comments are attached.

### ***Patient Safety***

#### **General**

- It is evident that those visiting NHS premises are confused about the differing hand washing and gel policies and practices adopted by NHS Trusts. Some Trusts, such as Medway NHS Foundation Trust have chosen to concentrate their efforts close to where care is provided, whereas others, such as Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trusts have a highly visible front of house presence. It has been commented that even where there is a high level of warning, many people are ignoring the gels and good advice.

#### **Hygiene and cleanliness**

- Still an area of concern to many respondents, but positive comments received about Maidstone and Kent and Sussex Hospitals. Mixed comments received about Medway Maritime Hospital.

#### **Closure potentially placing children at risk**

- The closure of the Sanderson Unit, a speciality unit for children at Medway Maritime

Hospital, to create additional beds to cope with winter pressure, has been criticised by a voluntary group as “breaking one of the key principles of protecting children by closing a unit which was safe and familiar for children who find it very difficult to adapt to change, especially one of such a sudden and devastating nature”. This commentary would also implicate the Medway Primary Care Trust.

### ***Clinical and cost effectiveness***

#### General

- On the whole positive comments.

#### Communications between health professionals

- Several comments over need to improve communication between primary and secondary care.

#### Service needs identified

- Inadequacy of pain relief service highlighted.
- Poor public transport links to hospitals in the West of the County.
- Shortcomings in speech therapy services in the Medway area.

### ***Governance***

#### General

- On the whole the perception was that NHS organisations were well run.

#### Challenging discrimination

- One organisation reported that “several” of their members had experienced racial discrimination in a unit caring for people with mental ill health.
- One Group felt that a poor level of speech therapy provision amounted to discrimination “against a sector of the public who have generally nobody to speak up for them”.
- One respondent questioned an organisation’s attitude toward ill people saying that they can’t “speak up without fear” of being belittled.

### ***Patient focus***

#### General

- On the whole positive comments.

#### Food

- Still an area of concern for a number of respondents.

## Discrimination

- One group commented adversely on the way patients with a history of mental illness may be treated differently and not have their physical ailments attended to appropriately.

## Privacy and dignity

- Procedure for sending lone ambulance personnel to females living alone.
- Lack of privacy / confidentiality in GP reception areas.

## ***Accessibility and responsive care***

### General

- Waits in A & E.
- Lost x-rays / notes.

### Service needs identified

- Lack of active patient recall to check on hearing loss and hearing aid suitability.
- Local phlebotomy service for residents of the Isle of Grain.

### Inadequate consultation

- Siting of Dover Hospital.
- Closure of Sanderson Unit, Medway Maritime Hospital.

## ***Care environments and amenities***

### General

- Signage at several hospitals.
- Cleanliness and issues regarding use of gels and hand washing as in 'Patient safety' section above. Improvements observed in Maidstone Hospital and Medway Maritime Hospital.

## ***Public Health***

### General

- Need for more supervision of hospitals hand-washing / use of gels required.
- More emphasis on prevention is required.

## **Conclusion / Recommendations**

It is recommended that this report, together with comments supplied by individuals and organisations, be forwarded to NHS Trusts within Kent and Medway as the LINK's commentary on the annual health check for 2008 / 2009.