

**FROM THE OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL MANAGING
DIRECTOR OF COMMISSIONING DEVELOPMENT**

SHA Chief Executives

Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS

Tel: 0207 210 5455
E.mail:
Barbara.Hakin@dh.gsi.gov.uk

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Dear Colleague

Following the announcement of the GP consortia pathfinder programme by the Secretary of State on Thursday 21st October, I am writing to set out the detail and next steps.

The objective of establishing pathfinders is to empower pioneering groups of GP practices that want to press ahead with commissioning care for patients. Specifically the programme will:

- identify and support groups of practices that are keen to make faster progress, under existing arrangements, and can demonstrate their capacity and capability to take on additional responsibility for commissioning services, in line with the proposals set out in *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS*;
- enable GPs, working with other health and care professionals, to test different design concepts for GP consortia and identify any issues and areas of learning early so that these can be shared more widely;
- create learning networks across the country to ensure that experience and best practice are spread and specifically that pathfinders support other local groups that are less developed, and
- involve these front line clinicians more in delivering the QIPP agenda.

This will help shape the ways in which GP consortia work in the future. By Making early progress it will also help support other emerging consortia and give them the confidence to join in the pathfinder programme on a rolling basis.

Our aim with the programme is to be as permissive as possible and identify a broad range of prospective consortia that can help identify how in practical terms to achieve the maximum benefits from future commissioning arrangements. As such it is likely that in the early stages individual pathfinders

will look different as this gives us the opportunity to explore possibilities in areas with a range of different circumstances.

Groups of GP practices keen to participate in the pathfinder programme should be invited to put themselves forward to their SHA, who will be responsible for considering these expressions of interest. However the expectation will be that any group of practices that wishes to do so should be able to join the programme unless they are unable to demonstrate:

- evidence of local GP leadership and support
- evidence of Local Authority engagement, or
- an ability to contribute to the delivery of the local QIPP agenda in their locality

The timetable for considering expressions of interest should be no longer than four weeks. SHAs should be in a position to identify the first group of pathfinders by the beginning of December 2010 and be ready to receive applications by the end of October. It will be for pathfinders to agree when they take on additional responsibilities, which could be from 2011/12, if they so wish. It is important to ensure that during this time pathfinders will be operating within the current legislative and governance frameworks through which plans, contracts and outcomes will be effected.

Other prospective pathfinders will be able to join the programme thereafter on a rolling basis. The expectation is that there will be a continuous stream of pathfinders identified throughout 2011/12.

All pathfinders should agree with their PCT and SHA how they can be supported in taking on their new roles. SHAs should work with PCTs to identify funding from within PCT savings to support pathfinder consortia. Further details on this will be issued by the end of the year.

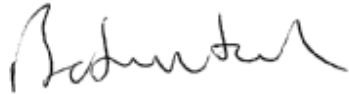
I would be grateful if you could also work with the primary care organisations and representatives in your area (LMCs, RCGP, NAPC, NHS Alliance and FDA) as they will be able to help and support shadow pathfinders with their aspirations. GP practices will also of course want to engage with a range of health and care professionals and with patient groups in developing pathfinder arrangements.

In addition, the Department is making available £1 million from central funding to support regional learning programmes across England. We are in the process of finalising the details of this, working with the national primary care organisations, but it will be primarily to support time for learning and development.

The Department is funding a Commissioning & Health Care System Research Unit through its Policy Research Programme. This unit is planning, as part of its research programme, to evaluate the commissioning strategies and impact of GP commissioning consortia. Early pathfinders will be given the opportunity to participate in this, which will provide a further opportunity to share learning.

Clearly by the very nature of this pathfinders programme, there is much more to do to support and enable GPs to develop the design concepts for future GP consortia. With your Directors of Commissioning Development, we will continue to work with the full range of stakeholders on this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barbara Hakin', written in a cursive style.

Dame Barbara Hakin
National Managing Director of Commissioning Development