

IMPROVING YOUR NHS: WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT?

We are making changes to improve your NHS. This leaflet explains:

- what these changes mean for you and your family.
- how to have your say.

What will stay the same?

The NHS remains a free, national, public service. Spending on the NHS will increase and not be cut. You have important rights under the NHS Constitution, including the right of access to the treatments and therapies you need, and the right to be treated with respect and not to be discriminated against.

What needs to improve?

At its best the NHS is excellent, but it's not good enough everywhere, all the time. We can do more to help people survive serious illness, cope with long-term conditions and avoid complications. Too often, despite the best efforts of NHS staff, people are expected to fit around services, rather than the other way round and they are not always listened to. People are sometimes treated as "cases" rather than individuals. People looking after sick or disabled family members don't always get enough help. Health staff get tied up in paperwork, and there is too much waste.

What can I expect to see?

We want people and their families to have much more say in decisions about their care and treatment. No decision should be made about you, without you. By 2013, we expect people everywhere to see these changes:

Better information and a listening NHS:

- You will be able to see, own and share your personal health records
- It will be easier to find out what services are available, how good and safe they are and what people think of them.
- It will be easier to communicate with your doctors and nurses, eg online and by email

- Your views will matter and NHS staff will want to hear them. You will be encouraged to rate the care you have received. Things will change because of people's views and comments.

Getting the care I need:

- You will be able to choose or change your GP surgery. You will not be limited to the one that is nearest to your home.
- You will be able to choose the treatments and services that best suit your needs. If you need hospital care you will be able to choose the hospital and the consultant-led team in charge of your care.
- Your doctor will help you understand the choices of treatment and service available, and involve you in all decisions about your care, and the care of your family members.
- Some parts of the country don't have enough family doctors, nurses and other staff. We will start to put that right.
- There will be good, safe care available outside GP surgery hours, with a single telephone number to ring.
- There will be better care at or closer to home, so that people with long-term health conditions and disabilities can live more independently and have less need to go into hospital.

Getting help and support

Local independent organisations called HealthWatch will provide help, information and support, and stand up for your rights. HealthWatch will be able to help you:

- find out what services are available
- make informed choices
- voice a concern or make a complaint
- have your say in the services delivered locally.

Behind the scenes....

To make these improvements we are changing the way the NHS is run. Local health staff and local communities will have more clout and fewer decisions will be taken by Whitehall and by politicians.

Health staff will have to account for the quality of their work and the results they achieve, not the quantity of their work. We will ask: is enough being done to save lives? Help people recover? Improve quality of life? Is care safe? Are people having a positive experience of care?

There will be independent checks on doctors to make sure they remain up to date in their knowledge and safe to practice.

All the agencies providing care and support services will have to work more closely with the NHS so that you get a seamless service, tailored to your needs.

Health staff will have a duty to be honest and open about mistakes, so that the NHS can learn from them and things can be put right as quickly as possible. There will be tough penalties for serious, avoidable mistakes.

The money saved by cutting waste and red tape will be put back into the NHS to improve care.

What do you think?

This is only a summary of the changes planned; you can find more detail at http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Consultations/Liveconsultations/DH_117782 . We want to hear your views and suggestions and you can make your voice heard by 5 October 2010.

This leaflet applies to England only. It has been produced by the Department of Health and put into plain English with the help of the charity National Voices.