

Call for evidence on general practice services sector in England

Issued on: 1 July 2013

Deadline for responses: 1 August 2013

Call for evidence on the general practice services sector in England

Background

1. For the majority of patients, primary care is their first and most commonly used point of access to the NHS. General practice (GP) services are an important part of primary care, with general practitioners (GPs) in England providing over 300 million consultations to patients each year.
2. There are about 8,100 GP practices operating in England under NHS contracts, and more than 40,000 fully trained GPs working in them, in addition to nurses and other health professionals. While these services are delivered free at the point of use to patients, general practices are paid over £7 billion each year to provide general practice services to them.
3. In addition to their role in delivering services to registered NHS patients, GPs have an important role in referring patients who require more specialist care and can help patients to take informed choices when such a referral is required. How general practice operates therefore has a significant impact on other health care services.
4. Like many areas of the health service, general practice is operating under increased pressure, with rising demand from an ageing population. Patients expect swift access to a GP and to be supported in making informed choices about their care. For many, particularly those with long-term conditions, being able to access their own GP is also important. Recent studies suggest that it is becoming increasingly difficult to meet these expectations and that the standards of quality and access across the country are variable. Monitor is one of a number of bodies who will need to work together to address these challenges.
5. Earlier this year Monitor published its report on the Fair Playing Field Review.¹ During this work, Monitor received submissions on a wide range of issues affecting all sectors of the NHS, including general practice. The review was unable to examine issues pertaining to general practice in detail. Instead, and reflecting both the importance and complexity of these issues, the review recommended that Monitor should issue a call for evidence to enable further engagement with the sector.
6. Issues relating to patient choice and competition in general practice have been considered by other bodies. The Cooperation and Competition Panel (CCP), now part of Monitor, looked into a number of complaints about these

¹ The review looked into the extent to which all potential providers of NHS care have a fair opportunity to offer their services to patients.

services. Among these were restrictions on expansion of existing GP practices into new areas as well as concerns about how individual GP practices are selected to deliver services across a specific area.² The CCP has also considered a number of mergers involving GP practices and providers of secondary health care services.³

7. Monitor believes that it is in the interests of patients to issue a call for evidence to better understand issues affecting this important part of the health sector.⁴ The evidence gathered will inform what further steps (if any) we might take to meet our duties under the Health and Social Care Act (2012), including our duties to promote an efficient, effective and economic health service, to enable integrated care and to ensure that choice and competition are operating in the best interests of patients.
8. A number of bodies are conducting work aimed at addressing the challenges faced by the GP sector. In particular, NHS England is developing its strategic approach to the development of primary care. This work is separate to Monitor's. However, we expect the evidence we gather to inform its development and will continue to work closely with NHS England and others across the system for the benefit of patients.

What the call for evidence will involve

9. Monitor has issued a call for evidence to determine the extent to which commissioning and provision of general practice services is operating in the best interests of patients.
10. This call for evidence is an exploratory exercise aimed at better understanding the challenges faced by an important part of the health sector at a time when it is operating under increased pressure. It is not an investigation under our formal enforcement powers. In the course of this piece of work, we do not propose to address or provide advice on specific complaints.
11. We would like to receive evidence from across the sector; from patients (and groups that represent their interests), current and potential providers of general practice services, providers of secondary care, commissioners of general practice services, government, regulatory organisations, local authorities, professional and representative bodies and any other interested

² <http://ccpanel.org.uk/cases/Churchill-Medical-Centre-and-Kingston-Primary-Care-Trust.html>

http://www.ccpanel.org.uk/cases/peterborough_pct_conduct_complaint.html

³ http://ccpanel.org.uk/cases/Merger_of_part_of_the_NHS_Warwickshire_Provider_Services_Arm_with_George_Eliot_NHS_Trust.html; http://ccpanel.org.uk/content/cases/Cases_under_the_Transforming_CS_Prioritisation_procedure/110405_GP_Prioritisation_Statement_FINAL.pdf

⁴ This call for evidence is a separate exercise from the review by Monitor of the provision of walk-in centre services in England which was issued on 31 May 2013. The call for evidence is also separate from the review of urgent and emergency care services and the programme to improve A&E performance being led by NHS England. Although those projects may touch on the role of general practice, their focus is on the provision of urgent and emergency care services

parties. We will issue information requests, arrange round table discussions and hold bilateral meetings.

12. We would like information about aspects of the provision and commissioning of general practice services which may not be working in the best interests of patients, including those raised during the course of the Fair Playing Field Review.

These include:

- the ability of patients to access GP services, including their ability to switch practices;
- the impact of the rules for setting up and/or expanding a general practice;
- the impact of the different contractual terms under which practices operate;
- the ability for new or existing providers to expand the scope of the NHS services they offer, particularly the factors that may influence CCGs or local authorities in deciding whether to commission services from general practice;
- the process for commissioning new services from general practices, the factors that influence these commissioning decisions and any challenges that commissioners face;
- factors that affect potential providers' willingness or interest in providing new services; and
- any new forms of primary care or integrated care that local health communities are planning or considering and any potential enablers or barriers that need to be considered.

13. We would particularly welcome submissions that include evidence that a particular issue acts against the interests of patients.

14. We will engage widely and openly with the sector throughout the call for evidence. We will analyse all the evidence we gather and publish an issues statement before the end of 2013 and set out what the next steps (if any) will be.

15. Depending on the evidence we gather during the call for evidence those next steps may involve more detailed research on specific issues.

Timetable of the review

16. The timetable for the call for evidence:

Monitor issues call for evidence	1 July 2013
Deadline for responses to call for evidence	1 August 2013
Issues Statement and next steps (if any) published	By the end of 2013

To submit your views

17. Any party that wishes to submit their written views, feedback, evidence or that has any queries in relation to this work, please email GPservices@monitor.gov.uk by 1 August 2013, or write to:

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