

RCN Policy Unit

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The case for change - Why England needs a new care and support system

Consultation by HM Government setting out the case for an open debate about the long term future of England's social care system

May 2008

Introduction

On 12th May 2008 the Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Health Secretary Alan Johnson launched a public debate about the long term future of England's care and support system. The aim of this debate is to engage with the public and key stakeholders about how the existing system can meet the challenges of the future.

The six month engagement process has now started with the public and all those involved in care and support for adults. The document "The Case for Change—Why England Needs a New Care and Support System" was published on 12th May to mark the beginning of this engagement process. This sets out clearly the case for reform, and seeks to consult on a number of questions. The responses to these questions will inform the development of a number of reform options, to be included in the Green paper to be published in early 2009.

The consultation process, although led by the Department of Health involves work across a number of other Government Departments, reflecting the fact that care and support encompasses many different types of services and assistance.

The RCN intends to consult widely with members and the nursing profession as a whole on the issue of social care. On the day of the launch of the consultation document Dr Peter Carter, Chief Executive and General Secretary of the RCN noted that the organisation welcomed "the opportunity to contribute to such an important document on social care".

The RCN Policy Unit will be leading the response to the consultation and briefings and further information will be made available to members as soon as possible. The RCN is also a member of the stakeholder group convened by the DH to oversee the consultation process and one of the key issues will be the funding of long-term care.

What is social care?

There is no clear and simple definition of social care. However, it is generally agreed it covers a wide range of care services provided by local authorities and the independent sector to individuals either in their own homes or in a care home environment. It also covers day centres which help people with daily living. Services that are mentioned as examples of social care include help with washing, dressing, feeding or assistance in going to the toilet, as well as meals-on-wheels and home-help for people with disabilities.

Over 2 million people of all ages, including children, and from every community, used social care services arranged by local councils during 2006-07. Councils spent £14.2 billion on social care for all adults. It is estimated that private individuals spent £5.9 billion on personal social care for older people alone.

Already rapidly growing demand has resulted in social care is being heavily rationed and many organisations involved have predicted that this is set to worsen. There have been accusations of a 'postcode lottery' effect with huge variations in the way councils provide help to some of the poorest and most vulnerable members of society. There is also a growing acknowledgment that the rationing of services for frail and infirm people in England has become inconsistent and unfair. Increasing numbers of local authorities are imposing a vulnerability test to deny help to people whose condition is not yet serious enough to be life-threatening.

A report in January this year from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) showed that 73% of local authorities planned to refuse care to people whose needs were not considered to be "substantial" or "critical". This excluded people with "moderate" needs who could not carry out daily routines such as getting up in the morning, bathing and doing the washing up.

The pattern and delivery of services for adults under 65 have changed over the last four years to promote people's choice and control through increases in Direct Payments, home care, provision of equipment and adaptations and – for people with mental health needs – professional support. The greater emphasis on housing with support has offered people more appropriate and flexible community services. Different models of self directed support, including Individual Budgets, are beginning to test out different ways of personalising care for people.

Why does the Government want to have a debate about care and support?

A new care and support system will affect every adult in the England and therefore the Government believes everybody should have their say about how a new system should work as so many individuals will be affected by these changes.

It is widely recognised that the UK wide population is ageing but increases in healthy life expectancy have not kept pace with improvements in total life expectancy. The total number of people with disabilities will also be higher in the future arising from heart disease, stroke, sensory problems, arthritis, incontinence, dementia and depression. Trends in these diseases have been used by Government agencies to estimate future numbers of people with social care needs.

There is now an increasing trend towards supporting people in their own homes rather than viewing care homes as an inevitable destination for the very old. Over the past 15 years, local authorities have scaled back in-house provision in favour of independent providers. There is an emerging emphasis on prevention and rehabilitation which aims to reduce demand for high intensity services.

At the launch of the consultation document Gordon Brown acknowledged in particular the anxieties of families who fear having to sell their own homes to pay for long-term care, and of losing assets they would otherwise have passed onto family or friends. The selling of homes and other assets to pay for long term care has now become a significant political issue with accusations that if you 'scrimp and save' for retirement you are forced to pay for your care and if you have not planned for your retirement at all you get your care free. One idea that was suggested is to tackle this including better collaboration between health and social services, and helping people to save for their old age while protecting their homes and inheritance.

Alan Johnson said the following during the launch of the consultation document:

"Society is going through huge change - care and support must adapt to meet the challenges this will bring because the current system is simply not sustainable in the long term. There is no option of a quick fix. Radical change is needed to bring together the range of activities, services and relationship that underpin care and support so that people are clear about what they are entitled to and how and where they can get it"

"Funding is a vital part of this debate, but it is not just about money. It is also a question of individual choice, enabling people to live as independently as possible for as long as possible"

What does the consultation document propose?

Over the next six months, the Government in England will be asking the public and stakeholders at a series of regional events for their views about care and support to create a new system that:

- Promotes independence, choice and control for everyone who uses the care and support system;
- Ensures everyone can receive the high quality care and support they need, and that government support should be targeted at those most in need;
- Is affordable for Government, individuals and families in the long-term.

As the UK moves towards a more holistic approach to the needs of those requiring social care services within our communities, new and challenging questions are arising in the way Government organises, finances and manages new services. A key part of this equation is to consider the amount that individuals should be expected to pay; the amount of help they should be entitled to from others via State spending, and the amount that perhaps their families might be expected to pay.

The Government is seeking to create a social care vision for all adults including older people, younger adults, people who are frail, and people with a disability or mental health problems. It is increasingly acknowledged that the range of social care needs for such a diverse population in itself presents a challenge.

The Department of Health in England has also launched a £31m programme to test the viability of innovations such as telecare and telehealth in supporting people with long-term conditions in their homes.

Does this consultation mean that the current means testing arrangements will be changed?

Speculation has focused on whether Ministers will replace the current means-tested charging regime with one in which all care users receive some publicly-funded services, which they can then top up, with further state help for the poorest users. Such a model was proposed by Derek Wanless in his 2006 report for the King's Fund on social care funding.

One solution floated by the Government is for people to pay into a compulsory social insurance scheme to contribute towards the costs of care in old age. However the Government has emphasised that no clear decisions have been made at this stage although budgets are clearly a critical part of the decision making process.

Are there likely to be significant changes in social care over the next few years?

The main political parties have all agreed that the current system is complex, unfair and unsustainable. It is clear that radical solutions will now be carefully considered to provide improved care, promote independence and avoid penalising those who carefully saved for their retirement.

Both politicians and civil servants are talking about the need for a new deal/partnership regarding social care but this raises some fundamental cultural issues for example do families as opposed to the state have the primary responsibility for the elderly, vulnerable or disabled and should society provide universal or targeted services?

The consultation document explores these issues however it does not at present include detailed proposals but rather seeks to establish the principles upon which more detailed options can be built at a later stage.

How can nurses get involved with the debate?

This important consultation presents the opportunity for the nursing profession to actively engage and participate in a frank and open debate on the reform of the current social care system. The following nine questions have been formulated by the RCN Policy Unit to develop discussion and gain feedback from members during the consultation document. This is not a comprehensive guide to the issues raised in the consultation and is a guide only.

- To what extent should health and social care services be joined up?
- Is it possible to define the boundary between social care and nursing care when organising support for individuals with long term care needs?
- What have your experiences been of working at the boundaries between health and social care provision and what solutions have been adopted in your area to ensure that individuals receive the right form of support?
- Should there be a basic guaranteed minimum level of personal care for free?
- Is it fair that people who have saved for their retirement should be asked to sell their home and use up most of their savings in order to pay for their care? If your answer is no then how can care costs be funded? (taxation/insurance schemes/Inheritance Tax/other options?)
- If a social insurance scheme is introduced do you believe social insurance should be voluntary or compulsory?
- The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) said in January 2008 that local authorities were tightening their criteria which determines who is eligible for care. Have you encountered varying threshold levels for social care payment entitlements between different local authorities? (if the answer is yes can you provide brief details);
- How can the Government support the provision of informal care?
- Do you believe that telecare and other forms of technology can bring any benefits to the provision of social care services?

RCN policy development- your Policy Debate

The RCN is seeking views from members about the consultation paper. Members are encouraged to send their thoughts and views to the RCN by clicking here at policycontacts@rcn.org.uk and to check the website pages at <http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/policy/projects> for updates on the policy debate.

The RCN Policy Unit will be conducting further analysis of the content of the consultation document in the context of the wider debate on social care. Your comments and the issues raised will be used to inform RCN position statements and influence wider RCN policy in the area of social care provision.

As stated earlier in the briefing the Government will be running a series of public events over the next six months where the key issues will be discussed in detail. These include a stakeholder event in every Government region and a number of citizen events. At the end of the six months there will be a final event bringing stakeholders and citizens together. Members are encouraged to attend these events if possible and actively engage with the process at a regional level.

Further information will be placed on the RCN web site over the next six months to update members on the progress of the debate on social care and provide details on how to get involved with the consultation process.