



RCN fact sheet: Local Healthwatch September 2012

Introduction

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 includes radical reform of the way that health care is commissioned in England. The Government's aim for these changes is to produce a more clinically-led and patient-focused NHS which is innovative and has reduced administration costs.

The new clinician-led commissioning system will involve a number of new types of organisation, which are forming across the country ready to take control in April 2013. This briefing outlines what we know so far about one of these – Local Healthwatch. **Please note that it is not yet clear exactly how these groups will function as guidance is being developed.**

Background

The reforms being introduced by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 are going to change the structures for delivering patient and public involvement (PPI) in England.

A new body, Healthwatch England (see separate fact sheet), will be created to work at the national level, while at the local level, Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) will be replaced by new organisations called Local Healthwatch.

Local Healthwatch

What are they?

Local Healthwatch organisations (LHO) will be champions for people using health and social care services in England. They will be corporate bodies, i.e. companies, but will also have to be 'social enterprises', i.e. organisations whose prime aim is to improve the health and wellbeing of their local community, and whose profits are reinvested into their work.

What will the membership be?

Unlike LINKs, the legislation creating LHOs doesn't actually require that they have members. However, it is likely that most will carry forward the membership from the LINKs which preceded them; not least since many LINKs have been actively working to transform themselves into LHOs.

What will they do?

They will continue to do the work done by LINKs, as well as undertaking some additional work. In practice, this means that they will:

- have the power to enter and view health and social care services
- influence how services are set up and commissioned by having a seat on the local authority health and wellbeing board (made up of representatives from health and social care to determine local needs and shape services – see separate fact sheet)
- produce reports on services, with a view to influencing the way in which services are designed and delivered
- pass information and recommendations for investigations to Healthwatch England and the Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- provide residents with information, advice and support about their local services.

What geographical areas will they cover?

It is proposed that there will be a Local Healthwatch for each local authority area, each one carrying the name of its area as part of its name, e.g. Healthwatch Westminster.

What will the nursing involvement be?

Dependent upon the model used, health care workers may be able to become members of their local LHO, as they are currently able to with their local LINK.

In terms of the wider policy direction, and operation of LHOs the RCN will be closely monitoring their development to make sure that the expertise and experience of the nursing profession is suitably used.