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Leading health policy unit warns against too much NHS competition

Posted on Thursday 19th June 2008

The forthcoming Darzi Review of the NHS must deliver more integrated health care, according to a new report from leading health policy academics at the Health Services Management Centre (HSMC), University of Birmingham.

Lord Darzi's Review, which is due to be published later this month, is likely to include recommendations about developing integrated care in the NHS.

The report's authors argue that it will be crucial to get the balance right between competition and collaboration if the next stage of NHS reform is to achieve real results.

The report sets out four different types of integration. These range from incorporating GPs and other primary care professionals into primary health care teams to integration that involves primary and community health care, hospital-based specialists and social care providers.

Chris Ham, Professor of Health Policy and Management and lead author of the report, explains, "in recent years, too many NHS policies have focused on tackling hospital waiting lists, and have done so by encouraging different parts of the NHS to compete with each other.

However, the biggest challenge facing the health service is how to respond to the needs of people with multiple long-term conditions. If the NHS is to do this successfully, it will need to find ways of encouraging different health care organisations ands professions to collaborate – not to compete."

Altogether now? Policy options for integrated care, HSMC's new policy paper draws on research evidence and international experience in order to make practical recommendations for improving primary and community health services

Professor Jon Glasby adds: "Integration is about providing patients with greater flexibility to join up their health and social care. The biggest challenge for the health service is helping individuals manage long term conditions. This is something that the Darzi review needs to address – potentially using some of the policy mechanisms like individual budgets which we discuss. The international experience strongly suggests that integrating health and social care is a powerful tool in improving services for patients."

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For further information or to request a copy of the report contact Ben Hill, Press Officer, University of Birmingham, Tel 0121 4145134, mob 07789 921 163

Notes: to Editors

1. Altogether now? Policy options for integrated care is published by the Health Services Management Centre, University of Birmingham (www.hsmc.bham.ac.uk). Its authors are Chris Ham, Jon Glasby, Helen Parker and Judith Smith.

2. Lord Darzi's Next Stage Review of the NHS is expected to be published in the summer of 2008.

3. As a result of demographic change, current NHS policy is seeking to provide more effective support to people with long-term conditions (for example, people with diabetes, depression, respiratory problems and coronary heart disease). These people typically require ongoing support over time, rather than the one-off episodic care that is a feature of so many NHS services.

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