

HEREFORDSHIRE PRIMARY CARE TRUST

Response to the report by Herefordshire Council's Communication Review Group September 2006

Introduction

In 2006 the Health Scrutiny Committee agreed to review health service wide communication strategy and procedures to assess their effectiveness. The scoping statement for the review set out a number of key questions:

- What is the communication strategy across NHS organisations in Herefordshire?
- What are the current procedures?
- How are staff and patients kept informed of developments?
- Are staff and patients consulted and involved in decision making?
- What are the levels of cohesiveness across organisations locally?
- What views communications as recorded in the staff opinion survey?
- Is the trend improving?

The review was completed in September 2006 and presented to the Health Scrutiny Committee. This report summarises the Primary Care Trust's response to each of the Review Group's recommendations:

Recommendation One

The PCT fully accepts this recommendation.

The PCT believes that communication needs to be a two way process involving staff and the people of Herefordshire. The Primary Care Trust has a comprehensive procedure for team briefing although there are always opportunities for improvement. The Primary Care Trust fully accepts the importance of communication with staff and its monthly team brief is disseminated via e-mail, as well as through regular team brief meetings. In addition, the Chief Executive has a series of open meetings around the County, called 'Talking Trust', and specific meetings are arranged to discuss key issues with appropriate staff groups. The Review Group felt that key messages were failing to be delivered to all staff which then resulted in a lack of clear, consistent and reliable information being passed to patients and public. However, the Primary Care Trust believes that it has sound processes in place.

Recommendation Two

The PCT fully accepts this recommendation.

This recommendation suggested that greater consideration needed to be applied in arranging times of meetings so that more staff are given the opportunity to attend. The Primary Care Trust fully accepts that it is important for as many staff to attend team brief meetings as possible and meetings are arranged to ensure this. However, there is often a difficult balance to be struck between providing clinical services and ensuring that staff are available for communication processes. The Primary Care Trust is however fully aware of its responsibilities, and has attempted to improve processes since the review was published.

Recommendation Three

The PCT fully accepts this recommendation which principally applies to Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust.

Recommendation Four

The PCT fully accepts this recommendation.

This recommendation stresses the importance of communications between Herefordshire Primary Care Trust and Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust. The Review Group felt that current meetings were voluntary and possibly personality dependent. It recommended that in order to secure continued good communication the current arrangements should be formalised. The Primary Care Trust is pleased to respond by confirming that the current arrangements are formalised. There is a monthly meeting between the Chairs, Chief Executives and lead clinicians of both Trusts. There is also a bi-monthly meeting of the Health Steering Group which brings together the senior clinicians and managers of both Trusts. The Primary Care Trust also meets with Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust on a monthly basis to discuss Service Level Agreement compliance and there are a host of other formalised meetings which take place between the Trusts, as well as the day to day informal processes which one would expect of the two significant public sector organisations responsible for the health care of the Herefordshire population.

Recommendation Five

The PCT fully accepts this recommendation.

This recommendation emphasised the need for communication as part of staff training. The need for effective communication with patients and members of the public is included in staff training and is an important part of the induction process for new members of staff. In addition, clinically and professionally trained staff will have had formal training on communication. The Primary Care Trust fully accepts that communication is a vital aspect of delivering

health care and accepts the recommendation that further emphasis needs to be put on effective communication as part of staff induction and training.

Recommendation Six

The PCT fully accepts this recommendation.

This recommendation highlights the fact that the specialist Involving People Team is a focus for public communication and that the Primary Care Trust could become over reliant on this service. The recommendation recognises that all staff has a role to play in successful communication. The Primary Care Trust recognises that all staff have a responsibility for communication and that the Involving People Team has a specialist function within this overall responsibility.

Recommendation Seven

The PCT fully accepts this recommendation.

This recommendation suggests that there is a need for integration with those at the top of the two Trusts to ensure that the organisation are proactive in what they communicate. Herefordshire Primary Care Trust has a small specialist public relations team that works closely with the Health Authority and Herefordshire Council's specialist teams. A fair amount of communication with local media is of a reactive nature but the Primary Care Trust regularly issues proactive press releases highlighting examples of good practice and achievement.

Recommendation Eight

The PCT fully accepts this recommendation.

This recommendation highlights the Review Group's belief that the PCT PALS should be commended for the work they have done in winning the NHS Alliance award for PPR work for two years running. The recommendation highlights that there is still much work to do. The Primary Care Trust fully accepts this recommendation and regards communication with staff, patients and the public as a key strategic aim.

Recommendation Nine

The PCT fully accepts this recommendation.

This recommendation suggests that there needs to be an increased effort to ensure that there are processes in place to involve people in decisions that affect patients and public. Herefordshire Primary Care Trust has an excellent relationship with its PPI Forum and involves it in all relevant affairs. It welcomes this important two way relationship.

Conclusion

Herefordshire Primary Care Trust welcomes the publication of this important report on communications via the Communications Review Group. Effective communications with staff, patients, carers and the wider public is a vital part of the Primary Care Trust's role. Whilst the Primary Care Trust believes that it undertakes these functions well there are clearly opportunities for improvement and the communication review highlights some of these.

Simon Hairsnape
Chief Executive (Acting)
February 2007