

25 September 2014

Subject:

A review of information and processes for making complaints about NHS and social care services: initial recommendations from Healthwatch Wiltshire

Executive Summary

Healthwatch Wiltshire has carried out a review of the local complaints system in health and social care. This has included speaking to local people about their experience of making a complaint or raising a concern. The outcomes of this work are presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board for information and to seek the Board's approval of the recommendations.

Proposals

It is recommended that the Board:

- i. Note the content of Healthwatch Wiltshire's report on complaints (and concerns) and provide any comments on its findings.
- ii. Approve the recommendations which are designed to improve the complaints system for the benefit of patients, service users, and carers.

Reason for Proposals

The right to complain about unsatisfactory service is a key consumer right. The NHS constitution makes a pledge to encourage and welcome feedback on health and care experiences and to use this feedback to improve services. Patient experiences at Mid Staffordshire, Morecombe Bay and Winterbourne View led to a series of reviews that have drawn attention to the need for an overhaul of NHS and social care complaints. Indeed, it was partly as a result of these experiences that the legislation was created for the establishment of local Healthwatch and Healthwatch England (HWE). HWE is currently undertaking a campaign that aims to improve and reform the health and social care complaints system in England. Healthwatch Wiltshire believe that it is important that the 'Wiltshire Voice' is heard within this national piece of work and that it is also heard by the Health and Wellbeing Board given its statutory role.

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A review of information and processes for making complaints about NHS and social care services: initial recommendations from Healthwatch Wiltshire

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to present to the Health and Wellbeing Board the Healthwatch Wiltshire (HWW) report on 'NHS and social care services in Wiltshire: Pathways to making a complaint or raising a concern', including recommendations.

Background

2. The right to complain about unsatisfactory service is a key consumer right. The NHS constitution makes a pledge to encourage and welcome feedback on health and care experiences and to use this feedback to improve services. The experiences at Mid Staffordshire, Morecombe Bay and Winterbourne View led to a series of reviews that have drawn attention to the need for an overhaul of NHS and social care complaints. Indeed, it was partly as a result of these experiences that the legislation was created for the establishment of local Healthwatch and Healthwatch England (HWE)
3. Healthwatch has an important role, set out in the legislation, to promote and amplify the voice of local people in the design of health and social care services and in monitoring the quality of those services. Commissioners and providers of such services have a duty to listen to that voice.
4. HWE has engaged with the public to find out more about experiences of navigating the complaints system. What they found was that people were unclear about where to turn when they have a concern or complaint and that they have little trust or confidence in the system to deliver a satisfactory result or deal with the concern effectively. HWE is currently undertaking a campaign that aims to improve and reform the health and social care complaints system.
5. Healthwatch Wiltshire (HWW) believe that it is important that the 'Wiltshire Voice' is heard within the national work which is taking place on this issue. As an organisation we have listened to local people and have heard that for many, sadly, their experience of navigating the system does not differ significantly from the national picture. We decided to carry out a piece of

work (a 'scoping exercise') to gain a clearer picture of the complaints system in Wiltshire and to talk to people about their experiences.

Main Considerations

8. Our work resulted in a number of findings which are summarised as follows:
 - a. People do not find the complaints system easy to navigate and struggle to find clear information about how to make a complaint.
 - b. Children and young people reported a similar view and experience of raising complaints. In addition they described feeling scared and/or embarrassed about raising a concern.
 - c. Often people simply want to provide feedback and have a 'dialogue' about their experience of a service rather than raise a complaint. However, the systems often do not make this possible or easy.
 - d. HWW looked at the information available to the public about making a complaint (on websites and leaflets for example). We found that often the information was hard to find, out of date, or in inaccessible formats.
 - e. HWW found some examples of good practice and innovation: some health providers are really making an effort to make their complaints process accessible.
 - f. People told us that they are concerned that vulnerable people might struggle to access independent advocacy for complaints given the confusing and complicated state of some of the information we found.
 - g. We found that anonymised 'trend' information about complaints is not being readily shared and that organisations are not working together as closely as they might to spot any problems or issues.
9. HWW believes that there is a good opportunity to make some changes and to carry out some further work in order to deliver an overall improvement in the complaints system and therefore in people's experience of using it. HWW would like to see health and social care providers do the following:
 - a. Respond to our recommendations about information about complaints so that people can find what they need in a format that they can use.
 - b. Ensure complaints information and processes are child and young people 'friendly'. Engage with children and young people to find out

what would work for them.

- c. Put in place a process by which innocent bystanders and non-relatives can raise concerns and complaints.
 - d. Make sure that people with learning disabilities can easily make a complaint or raise a concern.
 - e. Routinely share anonymised thematised information with your local Healthwatch.
 - f. Agree to participate in a group of providers and other relevant organisations, convened by HWW, to share good practice, innovative approaches, and to spot trends and shared issues.
10. Healthwatch Wiltshire has an important role in signposting people to all the information they require to raise a concern, make a complaint or to access independent advocacy. We will continuously review the service we provide and talk to local people to ensure that the information we provide is high quality and fit-for-purpose.
11. HWW recognise that there were limitations and constraints to the work we did on complaints. We would like to do some further work in the following areas:
- a. We will look at the complaints process for primary care
 - b. Learning Disabilities: We will work with partners to improve the complaints pathway for people with LD
 - c. Social care complaints: We will assess the provision for raising a concern or making a complaint about a social care service through our Enter and View programme
 - d. Children and Young People: We will work with providers and children and young people to put in place improvements so that the voices of this vulnerable group are heard.

Financial Implications

12. There are no direct financial implications for the Health and Wellbeing Board. There are likely to be some very modest financial implications for some member organisations of the Health and Wellbeing Board but clearly there are significant benefits to be gained by ensuring that the system for making a complaint or raising a concern is clear, accessible and fit for purpose.

Health and Wellbeing Board Member

Christine Graves
Chair, Healthwatch Wiltshire

Presenting Officer

Emma Cooper
Chief Executive Healthwatch Wiltshire

Appendix

Report 'NHS and social care services in Wiltshire: Pathways to making a complaint or raising a concern'

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