

RCOG policy briefing



Royal College of
Obstetricians
and Gynaecologists

Bringing to life the best
in women's health care

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RCOG briefing on the NHS Listening Exercise: advice and leadership

The issues

- Healthcare professionals, especially those working in secondary and tertiary settings, are concerned that GP commissioning will not be in the best interests of the patient
- Healthcare professionals, especially those working in secondary and tertiary settings, believe that GP commissioning will fragmentise services, leading to the further reorganisation of care
- Specialists believe they should be included in the decision-making process in the commissioning of services because of their knowledge and experience
- There are several mixed messages and the public believe that the proposals for GP commissioning will limit access to care and choice.

The main issue is the lack of consistency in messaging from the Department of Health and from the GPs (through the BMA, supported by the RCN) themselves. Although a large majority of GP practices have signed up as Pathfinders, some have signalled unease over the speed of the reforms while others have opted for a more conservative 'wait and see' approach as they admit a lack of financial and managerial capability to take on commissioning responsibilities.

The arguments

In response to these claims, the RCOG believes:

- That leadership should be shared between GPs, clinicians and other healthcare professionals and the term 'NHS Commissioning Consortia' is more inclusive
- That greater involvement by clinicians and other healthcare professionals in consortia will restore public trust
- That greater transparency and accountability in the relationships formed between consortia and stakeholders will ensure that all decisions put the patient first
- That Health and Wellbeing Boards are pivotal to championing the patient voice

An extension of the deadline for implementing consortia will allow breathing space instead of this perceived rush to achieve full sign-up to become Pathfinders. It would also allow time for the pilot Pathfinders to embed and demonstrate their success rate.

The RCOG's position

To help instil public confidence in the system and to get support from doctors and healthcare professionals, the Government must:

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- Ensure mechanisms are in place for consortia to engage meaningfully with clinicians and healthcare professionals on commissioning advice
 - Ensure that national clinical standards and pathways are the basis from which commissioning decisions are made
 - Ensure that commissioning structures are open to public scrutiny
 - Ensure that women's health is regarded in a continuum and the provision of care includes access to preventive medicine and support / social services which may be suitable for non-NHS providers to undertake.

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