

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: choice and competition

The issues

- The public believes that the NHS reform proposals, based on market principles, will limit patient choice
- The public believes that the NHS reform proposals will result in unfair competition based on price (resulting in an American-style healthcare system that is subject to EU competition law)
- The public believes that the NHS reform proposals will fragmentise existing services, resulting in a postcode lottery provision.

The arguments

These are issues of perception. In response to these claims, some of which are not unfounded because of the lack of clarity in the Health and Social Care Bill, the RCOG believes:

- That greater transparency in the decision-making process in the commissioning of services will improve public trust
- That the market economy must not destabilise local service provision
- That publication of a national tariff system will ensure an equal playing field for those bidding for contracts
- That clarity is sought over the extent of powers to be bestowed upon Monitor as the new economic regulator
- The existing clauses on Monitor to promote active competition are adjusted to focus on clinical outcome and not price
- That there is a clear demonstration of how the NCB and relevant GPCC expect to provide for the totality of women's health services
- That patient choice must be based on accurate information.

The main issue is the new powers that are currently being promised to Monitor. The public is concerned that this will result in the privatisation of the NHS. The Government should consider redefining their concept of competition so that the NHS is protected from being overtaken by large corporations.

The RCOG's position

To help ensure appropriate governance and to instil public confidence in the system, the Government must:

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- Ensure mechanisms are in place to prevent conflicts of interest in the commissioning of services
 - Ensure that national clinical standards and pathways underpin the patient journey and are focussed on outcomes
 - Ensure that procurement and commissioning decisions are open to scrutiny by Health and Wellbeing Boards
 - Ensure that Monitor engages with community and patient groups at the local level so that it is aware of patient need
 - 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
 - Ensure that the concepts of competition and choice do not result in unintended consequences in the delivery of local services.

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For more information about the RCOG's policy and public affairs activities, please contact Gerald Chan on 020 7772 6446 or email gchan@rcog.org.uk