

Stakeholder Briefing: Direct Access to Adult Hearing Services

Background and proposals for change

Five health commissioners across Durham and Teesside are working together to re-procure the Direct Access to Adult Hearing Services for Age Related Hearing Loss - Audiology Services.

The impact of hearing loss in adults can be immense both at a personal and a societal level leading to social isolation, depression, loss of independence and employment challenges.

Assessing the needs of patients with hearing difficulty and developing an individual management plan which provides appropriate interventions can reduce isolation, facilitate continued integration with society and promote independent living.

The ageing population means that demand for both hearing assessment and treatment services is likely to rise substantially over the coming years. However, a significant proportion of this client group will have straightforward hearing loss that does not require referral for an Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) out-patient appointment prior to assessment. These patients would benefit from direct access to adult hearing care services with a referral being made directly from their General Practitioner (GP) enabling timely diagnosis and treatment.

One in six people in the UK has some form of hearing loss. Most are elderly people who are gradually losing their hearing as part of the ageing process, with more than 70% of over 70 year-olds and 40% of over 50 year-olds having some form of hearing loss.

The aim of the service is to provide a comprehensive, patient-centred, direct access adult hearing service for age-related hearing loss in line with national guidance and local requirements.

Current Services

Current services are provided by a range of providers in the community such as Specsavers Hearcare Group Limited, Complete Price Eyewear t/a The Outside Clinic, Scrivens Limited, South Tees Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust and were procured utilising an Any Qualified Provider (AQP) process. Current contracts are due to expire across all providers in

May 2018. CCGs have re-procured a new interim contract ending in May 2019. Current providers have routinely submitted performance information against nationally agreed key performance indicators and to date, there are no significant performance concerns with any of the providers. The current payment method for the contracts is on a tariff basis dependent upon activity.

What Needs to Change and Why

It is recognised that improvements to the overall quality of service could be achieved by a review of the commissioning model in place, taking into consideration the current fragmented delivery approach. It is also recognised that the current financial model may not be sustainable in the long term and other contracting models and financial payment methods should be explored to offer CCGs increased levels of sustainability within financially pressured times.

Proposed Model

A project group was established to provide guidance, develop a service model, review costs and activities, review the national specification and tariff and oversee the procurement and implementation of Adult Hearing Services within the community across the respective CCGs.

Earlier this year, Executives from the CCGs agreed with recommendations from the project group to engage with the market to propose to manage the strategic commissioning of a single “lead” provider for the service who is accountable for high quality services being delivered from multiple points of access via a tariff based approach which has been implemented across other parts of the country.

As part of the programme of work, the market will be engaged with to ascertain their views on the proposed commissioning and contracting model alongside gathering appropriate views regarding financial options available to promote innovation throughout the life of the contract.

Next steps

A period of 8 weeks public engagement will begin on Monday 14th May 2018 until Friday 6th July 2018. We will be gathering the views of service users and local stakeholders about their experience of the current service and seeking suggestions on how to improve a future service.

You can get involved by completing an online questionnaire, using the following web link <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Audiologysurvey2018>

If you have any queries or require assistance completing the online survey, please contact the Communications and Engagement team on 01642 745 401 / 0191 374 2795 or at NECSU.engagement@nhs.net