

Royal College of Psychiatrists
Health & Social Care Bill:
Listening Exercise Submission



DATE: 26 May 2011

RESPONSE OF: THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

RESPONSE TO: Health and Social Care Bill: Listening Exercise

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is the leading medical authority on mental health in the United Kingdom and is the professional and educational organisation for doctors specialising in psychiatry.

We are pleased to respond to this consultation. This consultation was prepared by Professor Dinesh Bhugra, President, and Dr Laurence Mynors-Wallis, Registrar.

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The Royal College of Psychiatrists welcomes the Listening Exercise which the government is conducting in relation to the Health and Social Care Bill.

The College has taken the opportunity provided by the pause in the progress of the Bill to consult its members on some of the key issues that are pertinent to the delivery of mental health care.

The College is keen to point out that it welcomes certain aspects of the proposed Bill, such as replacing management-led commissioning with clinical commissioning, the use of patient-focused outcome measures as the measure of success of clinical care, and public mental health being made a priority.

However, following consultation with our members, the College remains concerned about significant areas of the proposals, and these are summarised below. The College would like to note that more than 1,100 psychiatrists responded to its recent survey, and 90% of the membership supported the views outlined in this document.

1. Specialist Involvement in Commissioning

The College believes that specialists, as well as general practitioners, must be included on commissioning boards and that, because of the centrality of mental health, each commissioning board should contain a mental health specialist. This will also give parity to mental health with physical health.

2. Integration not Fragmentation

The College is very concerned that the proposals for any willing/qualified provider will not lead to improved care as the result of competition, as the Government hope. It takes the view that the proposals will lead to cherry-picking, fragmentation and the loss of integrated services. In mental health

there are demonstrable benefits for both clinical effectiveness and patient and public safety from ensuring the integration of services rather than allowing a multiplicity of providers.

3. Support for Locally Determined Best Practice Pathways

The College believes that there should be clarification within the Bill that Monitor will not enforce competition rules in a way that inhibits local primary care and specialist clinicians from agreeing best practice and integrated pathways which meet the needs of the local community.

4. Medical Education

It is imperative that the next generation of mental health professionals is fit for purpose in view of changes in society and societal expectation, which is why the College would like to see service delivery and training truly integrated. The College would like reassurance that the quality of medical education is retained within any changes proposed, and would like to be certain that any abolition of deaneries as regional educational structures takes into account the quality of any proposed replacement structures.

5. Cooperation alongside Competition

Whilst the College recognises the potential benefits of competition, it has yet to see such benefits demonstrated in practice and believe that healthcare and, in particular, mental health care, is significantly different from other markets. The College would like to see consideration within the Bill using integrated and cooperative structures for developing healthcare, such as those in other devolved nations. This is also important in case staff and patients move across jurisdictions.

As a positive response to the proposed changes to commissioning, the College has established a joint commissioning panel with the Royal College of General Practitioners and a range of user and carer organisations. This panel will provide best practice frameworks for Mental Health commissioning and advice on outcomes in mental health care delivery, something is widely acknowledged to be often extremely complex.