

briefing

The draft NHS constitution in England



Introduction

We have heard much about the discussion that is taking place in England regarding an NHS Constitution for England. The purpose of this briefing is to look specifically at the principles and values that underpin it.

Background

The proposed NHS Constitution, is about safeguarding its core principles and values for the next generation; whilst setting a clear direction for the future. It reaffirms rights to NHS services, free of charge and with equal access for all, and it enshrines patient rights to choice and to NICE-approved drugs recommended by clinicians.

It establishes the principles and values of the NHS in England. It sets out commitments to patients, public and staff in the form of rights to which they are entitled and pledges which the NHS will strive to deliver, together with responsibilities which the public, patients and staff owe to each other to ensure that the NHS operates fairly and effectively. All NHS bodies and private and third sector providers supplying NHS services will be required by law to take account of this Constitution in their decisions and actions. It will be renewed every ten years

Principles that guide the NHS

Seven key principles guide the NHS in all it does. They are underpinned by core NHS values, which have been derived from extensive discussions with staff, patients and the public. These values are set out at the back of this document.

1. The NHS provides a comprehensive service, available to all irrespective of gender, race, disability, age, religion or sexual orientation. It has a duty to each and every individual that it serves. At the same time, it has a wider social duty to promote equality through the services it provides and to pay particular attention to groups or sections of society where improvements in health and life expectancy are not keeping pace with the rest of the population.

2. Access to NHS services is based on clinical need, not an individual's ability to pay. NHS services are free of charge, except in limited circumstances sanctioned by Parliament.

3. The NHS aspires to high standards of excellence and professionalism – in the planning and delivery of the clinical and other services it provides; in the people it employs and the education, training and development they receive; in the leadership and management of its organisations; and through its commitment to innovation and to the promotion and conduct of research to improve the current and future health and care of the population.

4. NHS services must reflect the needs and preferences of patients, their families and their carers. Patients, with their families and carers, where appropriate, will be involved in and consulted on all decisions about their care and treatment.

5. The NHS works across organisational boundaries and in partnership with other organisations in the interest of patients, local communities and the wider population. The NHS is an integrated system of organisations and services bound together by the principles, values and commitments now reflected in the Constitution. The NHS is committed to working jointly with local authorities and a wide range of other private, public and third sector organisations at national and local level to provide and deliver improvements in health and wellbeing.

6. The NHS is committed to providing best value for taxpayers' money and the most effective and fair use of finite resources. Public funds for healthcare will be devoted solely to the benefit of the people that the NHS serves.

7. The NHS is accountable to the public, communities and patients that it serves. The NHS is a national service funded through national taxation, and it is the Government which sets the framework for the NHS and which is accountable to Parliament for its operation. However, most decisions in the NHS, especially those about the treatment of individuals and the detailed organisation of services, are rightly taken by the local NHS and by patients with their clinicians. The system of responsibility and accountability for taking decisions in the NHS should be transparent and clear to public, patients and staff. The Government will ensure that there is always a clear and up-to-date statement of NHS accountability for this purpose. In addition, all NHS organisations will give patients and the public the opportunity to influence and scrutinise their performance and priorities; and patients, public and staff will be involved in relevant decisions about the NHS which affect them, either directly or through their representatives.

NHS values

The NHS values summarized below were derived from extensive discussions with staff, patients and the public:

- **Respect and dignity.** We value each person as an individual, respect their aspirations and commitments in life, and seek to understand their priorities, needs, abilities and limits. We take what others have to say seriously. We are honest about our point of view and what we can and cannot do.
- **Commitment to quality of care.** We earn the trust placed in us by insisting on quality and striving to get the basics right every time: safety, confidentiality, professional and managerial integrity, accountability, dependable service and good communication. We welcome feedback, learn from our mistakes and build on our successes.
- **Compassion.** We find the time to listen and talk when it is needed, make the effort to understand, and get on and do the small things that mean so much – not because we are asked to but because we care.
- **Improving lives.** We strive to improve health and wellbeing and people's experiences of the NHS. We value

excellence and professionalism wherever we find it – in the everyday things that make people’s lives better as much as in clinical practice, service improvements and innovation.

- **Working together for patients.** We put patients first in everything we do, by reaching out to staff, patients, carers, families, communities, and professionals outside the NHS. We put the needs of patients and communities before organisational boundaries.
- **Everyone counts.** We use our resources for the benefit of the whole community, and make sure nobody is excluded or left behind. We accept that some people need more help, that difficult decisions have to be taken – and that when we waste resources we waste others’ opportunities. We recognise that we all have a part to play in making ourselves and our communities healthier.

Reference

The full consultative document can be obtained from the following link:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_085814

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