Health and Sport Committee

NHS Governance – Corporate Governance

Submission from the British Homeopathic Association

General information
Thank you for the opportunity to respond on this very important issue. The British Homeopathic Association (BHA) is a charity that represents patients that use homeopathy across the UK including Scotland and have had significant experience with Scottish Health Boards and consultations around services.

Request to extend the deadline
We are pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the committee’s consultation, but it seems that this consultation has not been promoted widely. We only heard about it at the close of the week with little ability for us to alert supporters in Scotland to independently take part. We would suggest extending the deadline for that reason.

Our response
The Committee asks these key questions:

1) Do you trust NHS Boards to make decisions that are in the best interests of the public?
The BHA does not believe that NHS Boards make decisions based on the best interests of the public. There is little to no long term strategy for changes in service and most consultations are around removal of services not about augmenting or providing ‘better’ or an enhanced package of care which is measurable through less use of NHS resources and positive patient reported outcomes. The rationale for NHS decisions seem to be only about reaching budget targets in the short term not about long term solutions that will better the health of the public.

2) Are NHS board decisions open and transparent?
The BHA believes that NHS Boards do pay some regard to transparency in decision making with the the public, but true transparency is lacking. That Board papers are posted online a few days before a meeting and the board meeting is streamed online, and this is seen by the NHS Board as making the whole process transparent. That is false.

The papers provide some explanation as to why the Board should be making a decision but the governing Board does not interrogate the papers in a meaningful way, and nor is the public able to put meaningful questions to the Board for the meeting. Patient and professional input to the Board to interrogate, counter propose and enhance board papers in due time for the meetings should be part of the process and would make it far more meaningful and transparent.
Of particular issue are public consultations to cut services. NHS Health Boards were set up to improve the health of regional populations and to deliver better frontline healthcare services. A key element in both these objectives was to listen and act upon the wishes of patients to ensure they got the health services they needed. But when health boards conduct public consultations to decide which services should be funded, the views of patients receiving the services and the clinicians providing them are invariably ignored. More often than not, the decision to cut a service has already been made before the consultation is launched. Therefore these consultations are little more than health boards paying lip-service to the idea of patient engagement in the decision-making process, as they are legally obliged to seek their views. This is counter to the Scottish government’s expressed wish of putting the patient at the very centre of the health service.

Public consultations on health services need to be a genuine exercise in patient engagement, where the views of patients and clinicians are valued and acted upon.

3) How accountable do you feel NHS boards are?
There is very little accountability for decisions made and the real impact of decisions and whether they are indeed producing outcomes that benefit the public and increase the health of Scottish residents over the long term. Appropriate and useful data and checking of individual cases should be conducted and reported by a third-party to ensure the public is getting the best service. Outcome measures should be multi-faceted and focus on users of the service. The public is the NHS’s paymaster and their customers! If changes yield relatively negative results, the decisions should be reversed.

4) How effective are NHS boards at delivering health services and improving the health of their population?
This is answered above. There is clear lack of accountability to Boards about decisions made and realising positive change for decisions and changes made. I have not seen or heard from patients that services are better in the NHS now, quite the contrary. And services that have long term impact on future generations are consistently at risk such as ante-natal care, post-natal care, social care, mental health, etc. It is even more important that the government listens to patients and care providers and looks at the long term view for sustainability of the service and for health improvement of the population. Integrated health care approaches, complementary medicine and nutrition need to be considered as important aspects for proactive management of health issues.

Sincerely

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Chief Executive