Commissioning for long-term conditions: hearing the voice of and engaging users – a qualitative multiple case study

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Declared competing interests of authors: none

Published November 2014
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr02440

Plain English summary

Commissioning for long-term conditions
Health Services and Delivery Research 2014; Vol. 2: No. 44
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr02440

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It is estimated that some 15 million people have a long-term condition (LTC) in England and, while the number of people with LTCs is increasing, there have been concerns for a number of years about whether or not the NHS meets their needs. In order to improve the way that the NHS provides services to people with LTCs, successive governments have developed policies to improve the way that NHS plans and organises services and also to strengthen the involvement of patients and the public in decisions about local services. This project examined these developments in three areas of the country focusing on the experience of people with diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis and neurological conditions. We found few good examples of instances where NHS organisations involved patients and the public, but where there was involvement and developments started by patients, these were beneficial for them. The main problems were that the way people were involved was often tokenistic or good ideas were not followed through. Many initiatives started by patients were short term and not sustained. Recent changes in the NHS also meant that existing relationships between NHS organisations and patients were disrupted and people were frustrated at having to start again to develop new relationships with NHS organisations. Essentially, we found that involvement was more successful in places where it was supported and maintained, and where patients could see that it made a difference. However, the process of involvement can be seen as a delicate circle that might be easily broken, leading to people feeling frustrated and disconnected.
Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)
ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its proceeding programmes as project number 08/1806/261. The contractual start date was in November 2009. The final report began editorial review in August 2013 and was accepted for publication in March 2014. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

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