

Community hospitals and their services in the NHS: identifying transferable learning from international developments – scoping review, systematic review, country reports and case studies

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Plain English summary

Learning from international developments for NHS community hospitals

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Community hospitals in England have usually been local hospitals in which general practitioners and nurses provide care, often for rural populations who traditionally have difficulties in accessing larger general hospitals, which tend to be set in more urban areas. Because of a globally ageing population and advances in health service organisation and technologies, different types of community hospitals have now developed. It is important to better understand these models, how they work and how they might be used in the English NHS in the future.

The experiences of community hospitals in other countries may provide important insights and, therefore, we reviewed existing research and carried out detailed studies of five countries (Australia, Finland, Italy, Norway and Scotland), which included interviews with experts in each. We also visited four individual community hospitals in Finland, Italy and Scotland, interviewed staff, observed daily activities and analysed documents.

Our findings show that community hospitals provide a wide range of services. They can bring together different parts of health, social and community care, but the way in which this is done within and across different countries varies. Community hospitals can provide effective care and are valued by patients and their families, but there is limited evidence to understand these benefits against the costs of community hospitals. Community hospitals could make an important contribution as the NHS develops new ways of working, but there are a number of challenges, including how they should be staffed, the degree of local control and how communities can best be involved.

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