The capacity of health service commissioners to use evidence: a case study

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.
Plain English summary

Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) lead a network of organisations that plan and make decisions about what services to provide through the NHS. By examining decision-making about service interventions designed to reduce potentially avoidable elderly care admissions into acute hospitals, our study explores the capacity of CCG-led commissioning networks to make decisions that are based on evidence. Empirically, we study 13 cases of representative (region, size, urban/rural) commissioning networks in England, drawing on interviews with commissioning managers, general practitioners (GPs), patient and public involvement (PPI) representatives and other relevant stakeholders. CCGs can not only draw on evidence about what is most clinically effective or cost-effective, but can also consider patient experience and local knowledge held by doctors. However, the inclusion of GPs and PPI representatives is limited, so the local knowledge of doctors and the patient experience are not considered as fully as they might be in commissioning decisions. CCGs can use government agencies, such as commissioning support units, that provide external information about local population and existing service provision, but they fail to do so adequately. The voluntary sector can play a key role in providing local knowledge about individual patients and their needs. Finally, given the need for health and social care organisations to collaborate to support older people so that they do not experience potentially avoidable admissions to acute hospitals, there is a need for organisations to develop joint evidence-based strategies and work together in real time to exchange information. From our research, in collaboration with a PPI reference group, a self-assessment questionnaire for CCG-led commissioning networks was developed, which allows CCGs to assess and develop their capacity to acquire and use different types of evidence in their decision-making.
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