



NHS Service Delivery and Organisation National R & D Programme

ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE - A SCOPING EXERCISE

Introduction

The NHS Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme is a new national R&D programme that has been established to consolidate and develop the evidence base on the organisation, management and delivery of health care services.

The aims of the SDO R&D programme are to:

- ensure that good research-based evidence about the effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and equity of different models of service is available and accessible
- generate the evidence base to encourage managers and others to implement appropriate change
- identify and develop appropriate R&D methods
- promote the development of expert R&D capacity
- involve service users and other stakeholders in the R&D programme.

The NHS Service Delivery and Organisation R&D (NCCSDO) is inviting proposals to conduct a scoping exercise for access to healthcare.

Background

This topic of access emerged from the prioritisation process of the SDO programme. During the autumn of 1999, the NCCSDO conducted a National Listening Exercise of those who use and deliver health care to inform the SDO programme¹. One of the ten key themes that emerged from this process was "Organising the NHS around the needs of the patient." Aspects of this included:

- more flexible opening hours particularly in primary care
- appointments that can be booked at convenient times for the patient
- a choice of treatment settings.

The relevant NHS Modernisation Action Team has been asked to look at access and the NHS Confederation has proposed radical change, particularly in the light of continuing concern about waiting lists and waiting times. There are a number of recent measures designed to improve access to both primary and secondary care including NHS Direct, NHS Direct Online, and the two week outpatient appointment for those with suspected cancer.

There is a continuing increase in a consumerist approach to the NHS within a context of increasing demand for services. There is a trade-off between the conflicting priorities of service providers and service users in this respect. Moreover it is possible that improving access does not benefit the sub-groups of the population it

might be most important to reach. Equity will therefore be an important consideration. Access, using this restricted definition of availability of services to patients is a topical and important issue and we wish to increase our understanding of the area in order to commission further research appropriately.

Potential applicants are advised to read the National Listening Exercise: Report and Findings, and the SDO programme's future strategy (Using Research to Improve Health Care Services), which are available at <http://www.sdo.lshtm.ac.uk>

The scoping exercise

The aim of this scoping exercise is to advise the SDO programme as to what further R&D should be commissioned in the area of access defined here as availability of health services and characterised in the Listening Exercise as "Organising the NHS around the needs of the patient."

We would particularly like applicants to address the following:

1. Further define the various aspects of access to health care ie the scope and scale of the work.
2. Clarify the factors affecting access (for example, patterns of health care; patient characteristics including socio-economic status, ethnicity, types of condition funding and prioritisation issues)
3. Map out the issue of access and explore problematic issues, for example how improved access may conflict with the provision of effective care
4. Discuss the available research on access and on the relative priority afforded to various aspects of access by patients, health professionals, managers and consumer groups in relation to other evaluative dimensions e.g. equity, appropriateness and cost effectiveness.
5. Describe and discuss the research on the measurement of access, the place of comparisons between service providers and links to performance assessment.
6. Clarify areas for future research which the SDO programme might address

This scoping exercise will be used by the SDO programme as it commissions further research, both on access itself and for example, on different models of care. The scoping exercise should map current knowledge in this area. It should make practical recommendations to the SDO programme about further work, which needs to be commissioned in this area which may include a combination of secondary and primary research. We are not looking for a comprehensive review at this stage.

The exercise should involve a degree of critical evaluation of the quality of the research available. The map of existing research will need to identify gaps, which SDO could address.

Applicants should be aware that two similar scoping exercises are also being commissioned by NCCSDO on "Continuity of Care" and "Eliciting and assessing users' views on the processes of health care."

Methods

We anticipate that literature would be identified using a variety of methods including: the research team's prior knowledge; search of electronic databases; and advice from key researchers in the field. Applicants should clearly outline their proposed methods.

Output

A short report, which should briefly, and critically, describe current research, should be produced. It should clearly identify the gaps for further research and how they might be addressed, including the possibility of more detailed reviews of the literature as well as primary research. This report will be used to inform the SDO Commissioning Board on the approaches to take when commissioning research in this area. It is anticipated that further R&D will be commissioned on this theme during 2001.

Research specification

Applicants are asked to submit proposals (10 copies) quoting reference number WS1 by **Wednesday 30 August 2000**. Proposals should be on no more than 4 sides of A4 (minimum font 10pt). In addition to this please include CVs of the applicants. The scoping exercise should be completed in 3 months, and no later than **Monday 8 January 2001**. Proposals should cost no more than £30,000.

We anticipate that there might be informal discussions with NCCSDO during the three-month period to clarify issues as they arise.

¹ Fulop N, Allen P. *National listening exercise: a report of the findings*. London: NCCSDO, 2000.

Addendum

This document was published by the National Coordinating Centre for the Service Delivery and Organisation (NCCSDO) research programme, managed by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

The management of the Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme has now transferred to the National Institute for Health Research Evaluations, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre (NETSCC) based at the University of Southampton. Prior to April 2009, NETSCC had no involvement in the commissioning or production of this document and therefore we may not be able to comment on the background or technical detail of this document. Should you have any queries please contact sdo@southampton.ac.uk.