

NHS SERVICE DELIVERY AND ORGANISATION R&D PROGRAMME

PROGRAMME OF RESEARCH ON ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE Organisational factors that influence waiting times in A&E Departments

Introduction

As part of its programme of work on access to health care, which is currently in the final stages of commissioning some major projects, the SDO programme wishes to commission work examining organisational factors that influence waiting times in A&E Departments.

The NCCSDO recently commissioned a Scoping Exercise from a multidisciplinary academic team to map the topic of access, to identify what is currently known and to identify areas for further research. ¹ A contextual report was also commissioned to gain a better understanding of the current policy environment context within which a programme of research on Access to Health Care should be commissioned. ² It describes some of the many current innovations relating to access. As a result of this background work a broad picture of the issues relating to access has been built up, including attention to issues of access to health services, both in general and for deprived and minority ethnic communities and marginalised groups. This current call for proposals is for an empirically based project.

Call for proposals

Primary Research Proposals are invited to answer the following question:

What are the organisational factors that influence waiting times in A&E Departments and what mechanisms are available to improve waiting times?

It is known that waiting times in A&E vary greatly between departments. Audit Commission data gathered as part of a larger piece of work in 2000/1 showed that the proportion of patients waiting for more than one hour from arriving at A&E to seeing a doctor or nurse practitioner could be anything between 0% and 100%.

(www.audit-commission.gov.uk/publications/aande.shtml)

However in this study it appeared that none of the more obvious possible explanations such as staffing levels explained more than a fraction of this variation. The only variable that appeared to be systematically linked to waiting times was the overall size of the department measured by total number of attendances.

We are therefore seeking proposals from interested researchers with a track record of work in this field to undertake empirical research to investigate factors which affect waiting times in A&E departments. In addition we would like evidence-based suggestions for ways of reducing avoidable variation. We anticipate that researchers will use both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Researchers should clearly explain how they will undertake the research. They will be given access to Audit

Commission data. The first step will be to validate the data available from the Audit Commission and to confirm the variation found.

Potential applicants are advised to refer to the NCCSDO website for further details of relevant documents including the National Listening Exercise and the two access documents already produced for more detailed information. (www.sdo.lshtm.ac.uk). Applicants should familiarise themselves with relevant research already commissioned by other NHS R&D programmes (such as the Policy Research Programme (PRP) and the Health Technology Assessment Programme) to ensure that they can demonstrate that their proposals do not duplicate other research. In particular, applicants should be aware that the PRP programme along with the Methodology Group is commissioning work on patient safety issues in A&E. (www.publichealth.bham.ac.uk/nccrm). Applicants should also refer to the general criteria for prioritising research topics, developed and agreed by the SDO commissioning board, also available on the SDO website.

Full proposals for research funding for a two year project to undertake primary empirical research should be submitted. A short review of current evidence should be included where applicable. Proposals should clearly demonstrate that the research will give value for money, will add to already available knowledge in this area and include an assessment of the implementation issues involved in any changes proposed. The input of users into the research process should also be explicitly documented.

Content

Applicants should demonstrate exactly how they will undertake the primary research in order to provide the following requirements:

- a short review of current evidence on what is currently known about the topic area with some assessment of the strength of that evidence
- rigorous methods (including both qualitative and quantitative methods) for investigating the problem
- a rigorous analysis of the data gathered;
- justifiable conclusions;
- identification of areas for further research and how they might be addressed. (This may include reviews of the literature and/or primary research.)
- location of the findings within the current policy and practice context within the NHS.

Applicants will need to demonstrate clear conceptual frameworks to consider the issues relating to access which should be located within other work on access. Applicants will also be expected to demonstrate that they are able to draw on a broad range of both evidence and theory and should be able to demonstrate some awareness of international research as well as UK-based research in this field. Relevance to the NHS, and to the input of users or their representative groups in the research should be made explicit.

Outputs

Proposed outputs of the research should be clearly stated. We require an interim report at three months which contains validation of the data available from the Audit Commission, with confirmation of the findings, and a detailed scoping of the problem and of the methods to be used in the investigation. We also require an interim report at one year – stating progress made. The principal output of the final research will be a detailed report.

Submitting a full proposal

Full proposals should use the SDO form for this purpose and adhere strictly to the guidance notes given.

Applicants should identify the proposed research team and describe the location and context of the proposed study. They should include a very detailed description of the methods to be used, and the intended outputs of the research. They should also include arrangements for project management, including time management (Gantt chart) and arrangements for steering group/advisory board input. Applicants should clearly outline their plans for the dissemination of their findings.

In addition, applicants should indicate how they will:

- ensure that their team includes researchers whose knowledge and skills are sufficiently broad to deal with the variety of topic areas and methodologies which will need to be considered;
- ensure the continuing relevance throughout the project of the research to bodies at national and local level which have an interest in access to healthcare, both within and outside the health and social care sectors;
- demonstrate the involvement of users and other relevant stakeholders at each stage of the proposed research project; and
- build in a programme for disseminating the results which is compatible with the SDO Programme's Communications Strategy. Research outputs will need to be presented both in an academic format and in a format that will be helpful to end-users, particularly those with responsibility for increasing access to healthcare. The audience for the work will include those with responsibilities for implementing the NHS Plan, and those with direct clinical and clinical governance responsibilities.

Successful applicants may be asked to make a short oral presentation of their completed research to the SDO Commissioning Board.

We anticipate that there might be informal discussions with NCCSDO during the research to clarify issues as they arise.

Guidance Notes

Applications will be considered in a **one stage** commissioning process. Applicants should therefore submit full proposals using the A4 Application Form for Full Proposals. Applicants should submit **TWENTY-FIVE HARD COPIES** of their proposal to:

Ms Kate Thomas
Commissioning Manager
National Co-ordinating Centre for NHS Service Delivery and Organisation Research and Development
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
99 Gower Street
London WC1E 6AZ

The deadline for submission of proposals is by **1pm on Wednesday 2nd October 2002**. No late applications will be considered. Please note that we will not accept electronic submissions, faxed or hand written proposals.

The A4 Application Form for Full Proposals is available as a Word 97 file or Rich text format from:

- the SDO website: <http://www.sdo.lshtm.ac.uk/calls.htm>, or
- by Email from: kate.thomas@lshtm.ac.uk

TWENTY FIVE HARD COPIES of the proposals should be submitted using the A4 Application Form for Full Proposals (minimum font 10pt). Please follow the guidance notes that can be found at the front of this application form on pages 2 and 3.

Please ensure that your proposal complies with the Research Governance Framework, which can be found on the Department of Health web-site, or via a link on the SDO web-site under the 'Call for Proposals' page.

The funding available for this primary research topic is **up to £200,000**. We expect to fund one project.

Please note that our final decision will be based on the overall quality of the applications received.

Following submission of full proposals, successful applicants will be notified in **December 2002**. The successful project should begin in **March 2003**, and should take no longer than **two years** to complete.

References

¹ Gulliford, M., D. Hughes, et al. Access to Health Care. Report of a Scoping Exercise. London, King's College London, NCCSDO 2001.
<http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/php/hsru/sdo/>

² Rosen, R., D. Florin, et al. Access to Health Care. Taking Forward the Findings from the Scoping Exercise. King's Fund, London, NCCSDO. 2001.
<http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/php/hsru/sdo/>

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.