
‘Commissioning Services for People with Hearing Loss: A Framework for Clinical Commissioning Groups’ was launched by Chief Scientific Officer for NHS England, Professor Sue Hill OBE, at an event at Portcullis House attended by over 120 people. She introduced speakers including the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Hearing Loss, Jim Fitzpatrick, who kindly sponsored the provision of the venue.

The Framework contains important guidance to help Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) commission cost-effective services that meet the needs of people with hearing loss. It is the first deliverable from the Action Plan on Hearing Loss published jointly by the Department of Health and NHS England in 2015. It encourages commissioners and providers to take into account the needs of the local population and the views of people with hearing loss when planning services; and sets out ways to monitor how well services are meeting the needs of service users.

For commissioners it is a practical resource to use in discussions with local service providers and to help make decisions about what services to commission. It sets out the case for providing high quality services for people with hearing loss, evidence of the impacts of hearing loss and the cost effectiveness of hearing aids, and includes:

- local prevalence data for each area of the country
- a model service specification
- recommended outcomes measures and performance indicators
- innovative case studies of delivery models
- examples of where CCGs have streamlined the audiology pathway, and
- examples of integrated provision between the NHS and social services

For service users it seeks to provide services that make it easy for people to address their hearing loss, access hearing aids and be made aware of other support that can help them. If properly implemented, the Commissioning Framework should mean that when you use NHS services for your hearing loss:

- you are encouraged to seek help

“The framework represents a dedicated partnership with stakeholders and sets out a series of recommendations on how services for people living with hearing loss can be improved.” Professor Sue Hill
• services are easy to access and you should be told what services are available if you have a choice of services
• you get the information you need when you need it
• you are involved in developing the plan for managing your hearing loss
• you are given a follow up appointment after having hearing aids fitted and you are encouraged to return if you need extra support
• you are encouraged to give feedback and input on the service.

Jim Fitzpatrick MP spoke compellingly on the need for a Commissioning Framework. He highlighted the fact that the prevalence and impact of hearing loss is often underestimated; that many people wait years to seek help; and that there is good practice in audiology that can be built upon. Recognising the financial challenges that face the NHS he emphasised that the Framework will help CCGs understand the value of good hearing to service users, and to the financial sustainability of the NHS.

Other speakers included Professor Brian Lamb OBE, Chair of the Hearing Loss and Deafness Alliance. Brian shared the Alliance’s experience of genuinely co-producing the Framework. He emphasised that the publication of the Framework sends out a clear message to the health system and CCGs about the crucial importance of tackling hearing loss to ensure that people can live independent lives with reduced risk of communication difficulties, dementia, falls and mental health problems.

John Maiden, who was diagnosed as deaf at the age of two, took the audience on his journey from wearing two uncomfortable body-aids (for which his aunt fashioned a ‘bra’) to now wearing cochlear implants. His insights illustrated the good and bad of the NHS.

Fiona Carragher, Deputy Chief Scientific Officer shared her passion to continue working collaboratively to achieve improvements in outcomes, experience and services. The approach to improving hearing loss services is an exemplar of how partnerships across the entire health economy can make a real difference for patients.

The Framework has been described as: “a breakthrough for people with reduced hearing in England”