

Primary Care

NEWS

Health
conference
special

Primary care services under threat from government reforms

The Department of Health's new Transforming Community Services (TCS) programme is part of the government's renewed drive to force PCTs to separate their commissioning and provider functions, with guidance outlining timetables and potential models for PCT provider arms to take.

The options include PCTs forming arms-length provider organisations, community foundation trusts, social enterprises, integration with other NHS organisations, or contracting with integrated care organisations or private companies.

The government has stressed that it is not prescribing any ideal model, though there are concerns shared by all health unions that there will be pressure on staff to form social enterprises or for PCTs to contract-out services.



"The Department of Health says there is no blueprint for primary care services, yet it is heavily promoting social enterprises while glossing over the fact that this will mean staff are transferred out of the NHS", Karen Jennings, UNISON's Head of Health says.

UNISON is campaigning to ensure that continued NHS provision is the preferred option, with briefings and materials produced to help members resist attempts by PCTs to force provider functions outside the NHS.

PCTs have already begun to make decisions on the provision of services, though the Department of Health has stated that they must consult staff and trade unions from the very beginning of the decision-making process.

UNISON, working in partnership with the other health trade unions, has produced guidance in response to Transforming Community Services, including information on the new provider models emerging in primary care and their likely impact on NHS staff.

A UNISON factsheet has also been created for branches and activists outlining the timetable for the changes, the different organisational forms available to PCTs and the union's views on the programme.

The joint union guidance and factsheet are available from the Primary Care pages of the UNISON website at: www.unison.org.uk/pct. Keep checking the website for more information.



New Constitution protects NHS principles

A new NHS Constitution has been launched setting out the purpose, principles and values of the NHS, and the rights and responsibilities of patients, the public and NHS staff.

UNISON had a major input into the development of the Constitution and is supportive of its aims, particularly because it reaffirms the fundamental principles of the NHS as a comprehensive service, available to all, based on clinical need and not on an individual's ability to pay. It also provides greater protection for the NHS within the law.

The Constitution will apply to all NHS organisations and private and third sector organisations that undertake NHS work in England. UNISON aims to make full use of the Constitution to protect staff and patient interests.

Copies of the NHS Constitution and the accompanying Handbook are available from: www.unison.org.uk/healthcare

Primary care high on conference agenda

UNISON members are set to debate the important issues affecting primary care staff and services at this year's health conference which kicks off in Harrogate on 20 April until 22 April. Conference will vote on several motions that draw attention to the raft of government-led reforms affecting primary care provision and emphasise the need to protect members and NHS services.

A special focus event at conference, called 'Challenging PCT Outsourcing' will look at ways in which members and activists can get involved in challenging PCT decisions to outsource services, including the work being undertaken as part of the UNISON-supported "NHS Unlimited" initiative, examining outsourcing decisions taken

by PCTs and investigating potential legal challenges where consultation processes have not been properly followed. Speakers will include Paul Evans from the NHS Support Federation and Richard Stein from Leigh Day & Co solicitors.

At the focus group 'Getting to know you... New Approaches to Organising' conference delegates will get a chance to hear about the organising project that was piloted in Camden and Islington Health Branch during 2008 and has now been rolled out to a small number of branches across the UK. The project focussed on building strong relationships between the branch and all its members through 'continuous organising'.

More details on these and other events can be found in the conference guide

Personal budget pilots put a price tag on care

The introduction of direct payments into the NHS, as part of the personal health budget pilots in the new Health Bill could lead to patients topping up care with their own money and see means-testing in the NHS, argues UNISON.

Personal health budgets will allocate a set amount of money to individuals with certain conditions – the idea being that patients are given greater control over the way this budget is spent to meet their health needs.

UNISON supports more personalised care, with patients able to have greater influence over their care provision.

If your trust is participating in the pilot, please let us know by emailing health@unison.co.uk

However, we are concerned that the pilots are putting a price tag on health care and threaten the principle of the NHS being comprehensive and free at the point of use.

UNISON believes there are still too many uncertainties about what the budgets will do to the relationship between patients and healthcare workers and what will happen when a patient's budget runs out.

With the support of branches, UNISON will be carefully monitoring these pilots and working to limit the potential for personal health budgets to be rolled out without further parliamentary consultation.

Getting to grips with commissioning and procurement

Commissioning and procurement are becoming crucial issues for members across the public sector. UNISON has developed a toolkit called 'From Commissioning to Contract Evaluation: UNISON's guide to campaigning and negotiating around procurement'. This is a step-by-step handbook dealing with

the procurement process – from the commissioning of services by a public body to the outsourcing of jobs following the awarding of a contract to a private contractor. A training programme for organising staff and activists is currently being rolled out in regions.

The guide is available from: www.unison.org.uk/activists/procurement

How can you keep updated on changes in primary care?

Join us – together we are stronger and UNISON offers unequalled protection and benefits to members.

Call us on 0845 355 0845 now or visit www.unison.org.uk/join.

Get in touch – tell us about any planned changes in your workplace and help us distribute information like this newsletter to your colleagues. To contact your local UNISON representative, call 0845 355 0845.

Primary Care Contacts e-network – If you are a UNISON representative or branch contact in a primary care site and would like to receive updates on the latest national developments, please email your contact and workplace details to primarycarecontacts@unison.co.uk

