

Local leadership: how trust and ICB leaders can collaborate to improve specialised services

Webinar summary

Introduction

On 28 April 2023, the NHS Confederation and NHS Providers hosted a webinar for patient organisations, system leaders and providers to explore what effective service planning might look like under joint commissioning arrangements and what the respective roles of integrated care boards (ICBs), providers and NHS England (NHSE) might be. The webinar was organised in collaboration with The Shelford Group, The Federation of Specialist Hospitals, and the Specialised Healthcare Alliance (SHCA).

Chaired by Richard Douglas (Chair, South East London ICB), the expert panel consisted of David Williams (Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust & Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust Group Director of Strategy & Partnerships), Dr Sue Broster (Cambridge University Hospital Deputy Medical Director and Clinical Lead for Specialist Services Development and Integrated Care) and Archana Mathur (North East London ICB Director of Specialised Services and Cancer). Their discussion covered the following topics, with a more detailed thematic summary of each provided below:

- Opportunities greater integration brings
- The role of providers, ICBs and NHS England
- The importance of clinical and patient engagement and expertise
- Working with industry stakeholders
- Ambitions for three years' time

Key topics of discussion

Opportunities presented by greater integration

- For some trusts, working together has demonstrably improved their performance and service delivery for patients, as recognised at a national level.
- Speakers agreed that working collaboratively gives providers and commissioners the opportunity to think differently about how they can solve a collective problem in a new and innovative way. It also means trusts have shared responsibility for tackling problems that may not previously have been addressed.
- Sharing responsibility across a collaborative empowers and motivates people to work together to deliver change.
- Working collaboratively ensures opportunities usually available only to larger providers, for example in research and innovation, can be made more widely available for all providers in the area for the benefit of patients.

Key takeaway: Speakers expressed support for NHSE's ambition for greater collaboration, citing the benefits of working together to solve shared problems and how this elicits buy-in from providers to share responsibility.

The role of providers, ICBs and NHS England

- Speakers recognised the importance of the relationship between the ICB and providers, for example through a provider collaborative, with the collaborative having the autonomy to lead the relevant programmes of work.
- The ICB was also seen as a source of intelligence for provider collaboratives to better understand local population health with a view to transforming services, driven by data and engagement with primary care.
- Collaboratives and ICBs can work together to invest in prevention and early intervention. One speaker used the example of diabetes as a condition where investing upstream would alleviate pressure on acute and specialised services in the future.
- Speakers agreed that joint working with NHSE is important and provider collaboratives do not want to lose this support and the complementary skills NHSE provides.
- Speakers felt a national framework for provider collaboratives delivering specialised services is useful as a means of setting parameters, but these should be tailored at a local level to work for local populations and providers. There is a need to find the right balance between standardisation and local variation.

Key takeaway: The principle of collaboration between providers, ICBs and NHSE needs to continue, and more work still needs to be done to ensure appropriate flexibility in the way organisations work together.

The importance of clinical and patient engagement and expertise

- A key driver of integrated working is using clinical expertise across trusts, taking into account their knowledge of the risks, benefits and opportunities of working together at scale.
- Clinical networks are integral to the transformation and design of services. These must be aligned across organisations and with other operational pieces of work.
- Provider collaboratives are harnessing clinical leadership to drive quality and improve resilience across their area.
- Speakers also highlighted the importance of patient engagement at both a local and national level, there is no one size fits all formula for supporting patients across the country.
- One speaker noted that in their collaborative, they have worked with patients to determine how best to adapt local services to suit patients.

Key takeaway: Clinical and patient engagement is core to progressing the ambitions of systems through provider collaboratives, and plays a vital role in service transformation and redesign.

Working with industry stakeholders

- Speakers found that working as part of a collaborative provided trusts with a unified voice to engage with industry leaders at a practical level.
- There were a number of examples where working with industry professionals on artificial intelligence (AI), pharmaceuticals and other medical technologies has enhanced the collaborative's work on early intervention and prevention, allowing for greater innovation.

Key takeaway: Having a unified voice as a single collaborative can make it easier to interact and work with industry professionals.

Ambitions for three years' time

- Speakers agreed that their work on delegation will likely be ongoing but they hope their systems will become more mature, and that they will have a greater understanding of 'what good looks like' as a provider collaborative.
- Speakers hoped to reach a point where all members within their systems will be working collectively to solve shared problems, unencumbered by organisational boundaries.
- Speakers want to have achieved some core ambitions and goals in a way that clinical teams and patients can meaningfully see the value of working more collaboratively.

Key takeaway: Although systems will still be gaining maturity over the coming years, trust and ICB leaders are optimistic that real benefits can be achieved by working together to solve challenges that cannot be fixed by a single organisation. Different systems learning from each other during this transition year will be key.

Next steps

NHS Confederation and NHS Providers will share the webinar write-up with NHSE and we will continue to engage with them during the transition year, alongside our partners at SHCA, The Shelford Group and The Federation of Specialist Hospitals.