

THE IMPACT OF NEW GP CONTRACTS ON DRUG TREATMENT SERVICES – ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES TO A QUESTIONNAIRE CIRCULATED JULY 2004

Overall, the picture is of organisations in transition, just beginning to deal with the new system. In many areas arrangements are not in place, or plans to tackle the consequences of the GP contract have just begun. Interim arrangements which have been agreed for 2004/05 may not extend to future years. Unsurprisingly, areas with higher concentrations of drug misusers have seen the greatest disruption to services so far. The new GP contracts appear to have the potential to exacerbate difficulties which already exist, at least in the short to medium term.

Q1/2 GP Practices and Provision of Enhanced Services

- A few areas with big changes – practices stopping provision, refusing new patients, with consequently hundreds of patients left without provision (Fife, Lanarkshire, Lothians).
- Some urban areas have made provisional arrangements for this year, but have flagged up possible difficulties in 05/06 (Grampian, Greater Glasgow, Tayside).
- Most areas (smaller, rural with fewer addicts) showing little change, with few practices stopping provision/refusing new patients.
- One Health Board area with poor information on current position in relation to GPs (Tayside).

Q3 Alternative arrangements made for patients left without services

- A few areas where no service already (Argyll and Clyde, Borders, Orkney).
- No alternative arrangements (Fife, Grampian).
- Action Plans being developed or proposals required (Argyll and Clyde, Ayrshire and Arran, Borders, Midlothian, Lanarkshire, Tayside).
- Existing provision proceeding (Forth Valley, Highland, Lanarkshire).
- Alternative arrangements in place (Lanarkshire, Lothians (temporary), Glasgow).

Q4 Service disruption

- No resources for training (Argyll and Clyde).
- No resources (Grampian, Greater Glasgow, Tayside).
- Recruitment difficulties (Borders).
- Insufficient capacity in existing provision (Fife, Grampian, Highland, Lanarkshire, Lothians).
- Access to assessment and treatment reduced or delayed (Borders, Fife, Glasgow, Lothians).
- Local nature of service reduced (Borders, Fife, Glasgow, Lanarkshire).
- Waiting times increased (Lanarkshire).
- Quality of care reduced (Lanarkshire) or suspect (Tayside).
- Shortage of suitable alternative premises (Lanarkshire, Lothians).
- Staff workload increased (Lanarkshire).

Q5 Prescribing changes since April 2004

- Some GPs no longer willing to prescribe methadone and/or other drugs (Naltrexone, Lofexidine) once specialist assessment completed (Fife, Highland).
- Scripts for 'opt out' GPs now generated by computer, or signed by consultant psychiatrists or specifically employed medical staff (Lanarkshire).
- Audit due September '04 (Lothians).
- Some interest in buprenorphine as substitute, but no current approval (Glasgow).
- GPs will not be paid for providing 'withdrawal' or detox services (Grampian).
- GPs invited to consult Acute Psychiatric Unit's duty psychiatrist (Western Isles).

Q6 Impact on waiting times

- No (Argyll and Clyde, Dumfries and Galloway, Orkney, Western Isles).
- Yes, not determined (Fife, Grampian, Highland, Lanarkshire, Lothians).
- Yes, measurable (Kirkaldy – from 6 to 26 weeks).
- Waiting times already considerable (Ayrshire and Arran – up to 1 year).
- Advent of Community Addiction Teams has had more impact – they have attracted increased referrals in general (Glasgow).

Q7 Other comments

- Lack of resources may mean little or no provision in Health Board areas which have not prioritised drug services. Situation will worsen in future. (Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Forth Valley, Grampian, Orkney).
- Lack of resource in the new contract for GP education, administration and nursing/addiction worker support. (Argyll and Clyde).
- Complication of system/ reduced opportunities for integration (Ayrshire and Arran, Lanarkshire, Lothians).
- Possible impact on children of drug using parents if options for harm reduction reduced. (Borders, Fife).
- Potential for increased criminality and associated social issues (Fife).
- GPs opting out through fears of becoming 'sink practices' for drug misusers (Highland).
- Staff – increased workload and reduced morale (Lanarkshire).
- Patients with alcohol problems being sidelined (Lanarkshire).
- No central guidance on central elements of contract, leading to postcode provision (Lanarkshire, Lothians).
- Arrangements entered into for 04/05 cannot be sustained on cost grounds. Negotiations for future year(s) beginning September '04 (Glasgow).