

A resource to help primary care pharmacists in England involved in practice-based commissioning

What does practice-based commissioning mean for primary care pharmacists? Heidi Wright, head of practice at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, outlines the benefits of becoming involved and points to the various resources available

Medicines are the most frequent health-care intervention in the NHS. In 2006, expenditure on medicines in primary care exceeded £8bn and 752 million prescriptions were issued. However, at the same time, there remains the challenge of under-treatment, harm and waste from medicines use. These key issues need to be addressed to ensure that the quality of prescribing is improved and benefits maximised without detriment to patient care.

Primary care pharmacists, largely employed by primary care trusts, have played a significant part in managing medicines over the past 15 years. Their range of activities has evolved over this period but in essence has retained a focus on maximising benefit and minimising risk of medicines.

Primary care pharmacists can also play a significant part in practice-based commissioning (PBC) by engaging with commissioners in the prescribing and medicines management agenda. PBC is currently a hot topic within primary care, but a report last year by the National Audit Office (www.nao.org.uk) highlighted the fact that its potential as a lever for improving value in prescribing has yet to be fully realised.

Primary care pharmacists have a potential role in both the strategic management of medicines and the provision of services such as the management of long-term conditions and medication review. In addition, their skills in managing information and knowledge and influencing changes in behaviour can be applied to an agenda beyond just medicines.

What does PBC mean for pharmacists?

So what does PBC actually mean for pharmacists and what resources are there to help them understand this new way of working? Many will so far have had a limited involvement in PBC, and many of the documents related to PBC do not recognise the valuable input pharmacists can make in both the commissioning and the provision of services.

At a national level many representative bodies are lobbying for the involvement of pharmacists in PBC, so now is a good time for pharmacists to get involved locally.

What is practice-based commissioning?

Practice-based commissioning is a tool to improve the quality of services and access for

patients. PBC supports the move of funding to front-line staff to enable the delivery of system reforms, patient choice, plurality of service provision and investment. It supports the intention that commissioning should take place as close to the patient as possible to ensure cost-effective use of resources.

Under PBC, all practices will be given a minimum indicative budget which will be increased over time to enable the purchase of a range of services agreed with the PCT. A number of PCTs have already started the move to fair share budgets (the allocation of the practice spend on a capitation rather than historic allocation of practice budget basis) for 2007/08. Many practices have chosen to pool their fair share budgets and operate as consortia, with shared responsibility and decision making.

PBC should involve a number of other healthcare professionals, voluntary organisations, private sector organisations, etc. The challenge of PBC will only be met if there is effective collaboration between all professional groups.

World-class commissioning focuses on how improved patient outcomes will be delivered through strong local commissioning arrangements. The aim is for PCTs to be better able to invest in order to achieve high-quality and personalised services that improve health and well-being for their local population. It is expected that commissioners (PCTs working with PBCs) will take the lead on behalf of their population. Commissioners need to ensure that medicines management is considered in all relevant commissioning arrangements.

What are the benefits of PBC involvement?

Involvement with PBC has several benefits for primary care pharmacists:

- Linking the use of medicines into the commissioning process
- Working with commissioners to develop policies on high cost drugs
- Developing medicines management programmes
- Improving cost-effective prescribing
- Providing medicines input into care pathways
- Linking into health economy policies and area prescribing committees

- Providing links into the community pharmacy programme, eg, medicine use reviews

What are the risks of not getting involved?

PCTs need to be clear about how medicines management services fit within the overall commissioner/provider split. It is important that existing medicines management services remain fit for purpose and that opportunities are taken to develop new services.

As PBC develops, one of the initial aspects that commissioning groups tend to consider is how to optimise the use of the prescribing budget and generally improve the use of medicines. As experts in the field of medicines management and analysis of prescribing data, primary care pharmacists are well placed to provide this service. If they do not engage with commissioners now, this service may be gained from other providers.

It is a possibility that current PCT medicines management teams will devolve to PBC clusters. Alternatively, PCT medicines management teams could set up service level agreements with PBC clusters for the provision of defined services.

What needs to happen at a local level?

PCT heads of medicine management and medicines management teams, including practice based pharmacists, need to:

- Agree structures, service level agreements etc with the PBC cluster leads
- Agree rules of engagement with PBC clusters
- Support the development of PBC cluster prescribing policies and action plans
- Ensure PBC clusters link into the development of health economy prescribing policy through area prescribing committees, etc
- Link the community pharmacy contract with the medicines management and prescribing agenda
- Support the development of PBC prescribing incentive schemes or the devolution of PCT schemes to PBC cluster level
- Get involved in the development of care pathways and service redesign

Selling primary care pharmacy

The benefits of the full range of medicines management support, including provision from primary care pharmacists, need to be

made clear to practice-based commissioners. The benefits include the following:

- Supporting the achievement of key NHS targets and optimising Quality and Outcomes Framework outcome measures
- Ensuring patient pathways take account of appropriate, evidence-based prescribing and medicines management
- Helping avoid unplanned hospital admissions by supporting patients with long-term conditions and optimise medicines
- Reducing workload in general practice to release capacity to deliver PBC priorities
- Participating in or supporting medication review within clinics and, where appropriate, using independent or supplementary prescribing skills

A number of these models of engagement with practice-based commissioners are now emerging in primary care.

Resources for primary care pharmacists

The Panel below sets out sources of information that should be of value to primary care pharmacists wishing to become involved with practice-based commissioning.

Sources of useful information on practice-based commissioning for primary care pharmacists

Department of Health The Department of Health has set up a separate section on its website which contains all the resources it has produced for PBC, including frequently asked questions and the latest news. It can be found at www.dh.gov.uk.

Improvement Foundation The Improvement Foundation is running the national PBC development programme, which currently involves 70 per cent of PCTs. The main programme consists of a collaborative, which is running in three waves. Local pharmaceutical committees and pharmacists need to be aware of any teams within their area and either get involved or learn from these sites. Details of the centres and the programme are at www.improvementfoundation.org. The local centres are in the process of setting up PBC days for all PCTs and, again, pharmacists are encouraged to get involved in these. Other resources include a "Practice based commissioning assessment framework" (2005), which is available at www.improve.nhs.uk. This framework is designed to help practices and PCTs to undertake a diagnosis of their capacity and capability to meet the challenges of implementing PBC and to identify development needs.

The Improvement Foundation website also contains a great deal of information on PBC and also "at a glance" guides, as well as examples of service redesign.

The Improvement Foundation development programmes are also available to community pharmacists including the leadership programme; and quality improvement skills training can be delivered locally to teams. Further details are also available from the foundation's regional centres.

National Prescribing Centre The role of the National Prescribing Centre is to promote and support high quality, cost-effective prescribing and medicines management across the NHS, to help improve patient care and services. A significant number of NPC outputs will facilitate engagement with PBCs and support implementation of prescribing and medicines management priorities. The NPC has recently launched NPCi, a new interactive web-based educational resource to

support prescribing and medicines management. It can be found at www.npci.org.uk.

The NPC will be launching a number of initiatives to support individuals working on prescribing and medicines management issues within practice based commissioning groups during 2008.

The Information Centre: prescribing support The Information Centre for Health and Social Care (www.ic.nhs.uk) has a prescribing support unit (PSU) that produces reports and publications that will help pharmacists see where they fit into the national picture. Its publications include: hospital prescribing, England (annual report); prescriptions dispensed; prescription cost analysis; national prescribing costs and items (monthly section level reports); PSU National Prescribing Reports (quarterly); PSU Prescribing Monitoring Documents (quarterly); and National Quality and Outcomes Framework data. See www.ic.nhs.uk/psu.

Also available is National Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) achievement data derived from the Quality Management Analysis System (QMAS), a national system that uses data from general practices to calculate individual practices' QOF achievement. See www.ic.nhs.uk/psu/services/QOF.

NHS Comparators NHS Comparators (an NHSNet site) is a national resource, focused on supporting practice-based commissioning. It supports comparisons at the GP practice, PCT, strategic health authority and national levels, enabling users to investigate aspects of local commissioning activity, costs and outcomes. It is designed to supplement information available through local systems, not to replace local systems. The comparators have been developed by the Information Centre, Connecting for Health and can be found at www.nhscomparators.nhs.uk. The system was launched nationally in June 2007 and is continuing to be developed. The system is available to all GP practices, in addition to SHAs, PCTs, trusts, and other relevant organisations. Information on how to register can be obtained by e-mailing enquiries@ic.nhs.uk or telephoning 0845 300 6016.

Primary Care Pharmacists Association The Primary Care Pharmacists Association was founded in April 1999, primarily as a forum for education, training and support for pharmacists in primary care. It offers a service to members to provide national and local peer support groups, to provide a series of local education events throughout the UK, to allow members to publish research and to present work at educational events. See www.pcpa.org.uk.

NHS Alliance The NHS Alliance has published a number of useful documents, which are available at www.nhsalliance.org. However, these are only available to download for alliance members.

National Association of Primary Care The National Association of Primary Care has a number of useful documents for member commissioners and providers, many of which are related to PBC, including "Prescribing support and pharmaceutical advice for practice-based commissioners". See www.napc.co.uk.

Primary Care Contracting Primary Care Contracting has provided a wealth of information on PBC and has developed a bulletin on "Pharmacy and PBC". It also has regional advisers who may be a useful resource locally. See www.primarycarecontracting.nhs.uk.

Health Policy Forum The Health Policy Forum is made up of representatives from the Company Chemists Association, the National Pharmacy Association, the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. In December 2006 the forum published "Making commissioning effective in the reformed NHS in England", which sought to determine what makes for good or effective commissioning. See the "Working with other bodies" page in the "World of pharmacy" section of the Society's website (www.rpsgb.org.uk).

Commissioning Toolkit for Long Term Conditions The Commissioning Toolkit for Long Term Conditions brings together information and resources to help commission effective patient-centred services. See www.commissioningforthelongterm.org.uk.

Gifts

Hand-finished replicas of seven ceramic jars from the collections of the Museum of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society are available for purchase from the Society. They include a 15cm leech jar (£50), a 16cm drug jar (£56), an 18cm spouted syrup jar (£86) and four 8.5cm jars — a pill jar, two lozenges jars and an extract jar (£25 each).

The jars are available by mail order direct from the museum. Full details and an order form can be downloaded from the museum section of the Society's

website (www.rpsgb.org/informationresources), which also has photographs of the jars. Alternatively, orders can be placed by contacting the Museum Office, Royal Pharmaceutical Society, 1 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7JN (tel 020 7572 2210; e-mail museum@rpsgb.org).

The jars and other merchandise, including greeting cards and books, can also be bought in person from the Library at the Society's headquarters during normal working hours.