

BMA Council Thursday 24th November 2011

opposes plans to "privatise" commissioning

BMA Council called for the withdrawal of government plans that are likely to lead to support services for clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in England being provided solely by large commercial organisations after 2016. An urgent meeting has been requested with the Secretary of State for Health to raise the BMA's concerns.

Draft guidance from the Department of Health - Developing commissioning support: Towards service excellence - makes a number of recommendations about how clinical commissioning groups should function, including how they should access technical and "back-office" support, such as analysing sensitive population data.

Current primary care trust (PCT) clusters are forming commissioning support units and, from 2016, would be encouraged to form social enterprises and partner with the private sector, rather than remaining part of the NHS family. Commercially-focused criteria to determine eligibility for providing commissioning support would also be introduced, making it almost impossible for CCGs to have their own, in-house support staff.

Dr Hamish Meldrum, Chairman of BMA Council, said: "A key plank of the government's NHS reforms was to entrust GPs and other health care professionals to lead on the commissioning of services for patients to ensure local health needs were met. These latest proposals from the government have the potential to seriously undermine this role, restricting the freedom and independence that clinically-led commissioning groups need to make locally sensitive, locally accountable, patient-focused decisions.

"Doctors tell us about the chaos they are already seeing on the ground as more and more change is implemented. The government should be focusing on ensuring the skills and experience of staff in current PCT clusters are retained. They will be invaluable in supporting the development of CCGs and providing much needed continuity during this period of huge financial pressure and structural overhaul.

"We will be urging CCGs to urgently review and where necessary change their structures to ensure they are able to fulfil their statutory functions without becoming dependent on external commissioning support."

Following these deliberations, Council took a decision to oppose the whole Health and Social Care Bill, passing the following motion:

In view of the implications of the recently published DH document 'Developing Commissioning Support: Towards Service Excellence', BMA Council

**- publicly announces its opposition to the whole Health and Social Care Bill
- calls for rapid organisation of a public campaign of opposition to the Health and Social Care Bill.**

The BMA will be considering its next steps as part of its continuing activities on the Bill.