



The Review of NHS Pathology Services in England

Chaired by Lord Carter of Coles

Newsletter – July 2007

Foreword by Lord Carter of Coles

"Since we published our first report last August we have been working very closely with our twelve pilots to gather good quality useable data about the costs, activity and performance of NHS Pathology Services. I would like to thank the pilots for their co-operation and hard work, which I know hasn't been easy, in helping us gather this information.

"We believe, and indeed it was our aim, that we should be the best informed group about pathology services in England. The data we have collected will be used alongside existing information from the Healthcare Commission, Keele University and the Royal College of Pathologists, to model different options for reconfiguring the service.

"Pathology is an important and influential part of NHS expenditure, accounting for around £2.5 billion each year or nearly 4% of NHS spend. It touches the lives of substantial numbers of people. Pathology plays a part in diagnosing seven in ten patients' conditions. As we move forward we need to ask questions such as is pathology a service or a set of services? Are we clear what patients actually want? Is the workforce being used effectively?

"You've told us that there is room for change. Now we want to hear from you how that change can be achieved. How do you want your service to look in five or ten years? Over the coming weeks we will be consulting with our pilot areas. If you would like to have your say, then email us at info@TheCarterReview.com.

"Pathology is, in my view, one of the most interesting areas of medicine and it is growing. One of my aims, as the NHS moves forward, is to ensure pathology achieves the professional and firm footing it so truly deserves."

LORD CARTER OF COLES

Chair of the Independent Review of NHS Pathology Services in England

Where are we now?

Last August the Minister for Health, then Lord Warner, published the report of Lord Carter's Independent Review of NHS Pathology Services in England. Lord Warner accepted the case made by Lord Carter for a number of pilots to be set up in order to verify the validity of the report's original recommendations.

Since then we have concentrated on establishing the evidence base for reforming NHS pathology services. In order to do this, twelve pilot sites were selected, at least one from each Strategic Health Authority, to ensure good representation across the country's diverse geography and demography. The Review then employed Collinson Grant Healthcare to collect detailed information on activity, costs, quality and service levels from all twelve pilots.

The questionnaires have been completed and returned and the data analysed. The information we have covers activity and costs – both direct and indirect – including not only what is done within the walls of the laboratory but also outside. It covers an end-to-end service.

The Collinson Grant Healthcare data was presented to the Review last month. We are currently analysing it, in addition to existing information from the Healthcare Commission, and the Royal College of Pathologists, to identify trends and similarities, as well as variations and the reasons for such differences.

The body of information we now have provides a real insight into how pathology operates in England and the variations that exist.

The data is being used to inform the work of Frontier Economics as they help us to model, first on a pilot and then on a national basis, different options for future reconfiguration.

Maintaining quality is central to the work of the Review and we are looking at how best to define a good quality service. The Review is listening to what service providers are telling us about the current risks to quality and problems that exist, including logistics and IT.

As part of its reconfiguration work, the Review will look at implementation and consider what incentives and sanctions are necessary to deliver change.

The Collinson Grant Healthcare data

The Collinson Grant Healthcare data was collected from twelve pilot sites, covering urban, rural and metropolitan areas. The data collection has been an ongoing, iterative process, in close consultation with the pilot sites, and the Review would like to thank them for their co-operation and hard work.

The data shows variations in a number of areas including activity and costs. The Review has undertaken not to reveal information about the individual pilot sites without their express permission. We have, however, produced some provisional headline figures to illustrate the type of information we have collected.

Some example figures are:

- Biochemistry accounts for 56% of all tests but only 23% of costs, whereas histopathology accounts for 1% of tests but 18% of the costs.
- For pilot sites undertaking similar volumes of histopathology cases, the workforce varies considerably, with one pilot using twice as many MLAs (Medical Laboratory Assistants) proportionally as another.
- 70% of activity and 72% of staff costs lie within the laboratory – so a significant amount of both activity and cost lies outside the lab.
- Urgent tests – those needing to be turned around in under four hours – account for around 10% of all tests.
- The cost of a routine biochemistry test ranges from £0.84 to £3.95.
- Complex histopathology cases range in cost from £122 to £937 each.
- There is evidence that economies of scale apply.

At a meeting last month, the pilots were provided with detailed analysis relating to their own service. Collinson Grant Healthcare has presented its findings to the Review and final analysis is taking place before the final data set is agreed.

What happens next?

With the evidence we now have, the Review has asked Frontier Economics to help us with some economic modelling to identify options for future reconfiguration.

Frontier has been commissioned to analyse a range of options for reconfiguration. They will draw on data from Collinson Grant, The Healthcare Commission, and a specially commissioned questionnaire. The analysis will examine the relationship between scale and delivery costs, before examining the impact of configuration options on delivery costs and service quality.

As part of this work, the Review and Frontier Economics are asking the pilots and others, key questions. For example how should the service look in five to ten years time? Do we want to see a single service or a set of services? What scope is there to make pathology services more user-focused? Do we have the right skills mix in the workforce? How could pathology roles be made more relevant and interesting? Is there adequate career progression and development?

We are keen to hear a wide range of views, so if you have any thoughts on these questions, or others, then please email us at info@TheCarterReview.com or phone The Project Office on 020 7270 5289.

The Health Service Journal Conference

The Review's Chair Lord Carter, and members of the Review team participated in the recent Health Service Journal Conference *Driving Pathology Modernisation*, which took place at Earls Court on June 28th.

Copies of Lord Carter's speech and the press notice which accompanied it are available on our website.

Major Milestones 2007

The major milestones are:

- July/August - Analysing the results of the Collinson Grant Healthcare data
- July/ August - Finalising the Economic Modelling work by Frontier Economics
- August/September - Preparing the results of our analysis and recommendations
- October - report made to Health Ministers
- October '07-March '08 - Planning for implementation

Background to the Carter Review

In September 2005, Lord Carter was asked to conduct an independent review into Pathology Services. Findings from the first phase of the work, which was completed last August, included:

- significant discrepancies in performance and standards across the country
- inconsistent financial information;
- duplication of the ordering of tests between primary and secondary care;
- a rise in demand for testing of an average 10% per annum over the past three years;
- a lack of end-to-end IT;
- clinicians wanting to get out of the laboratory and into wider clinical settings.

As part of the second phase of work the Review team is continuing to:

- collect evidence and information on the existing service;
- compare the current domestic service with international comparisons;
- model different options showing how reorganisation might take place;
- look at incentives for change;
- consider how reform may be funded.

The work of the Review is overseen by The Project Board. The Board aims to meet once every 4-6 weeks to provide leadership to the review team. The Project Board has the following brief:

"The Project Board, chaired by Lord Carter of Coles, will be responsible for developing and implementing the second stage of the independent Review of NHS pathology services in England. In particular it will be responsible for initiating, steering and evaluating a series of pilot projects in England, as part of a broader programme to test the feasibility of implementing the recommendations set out in the report on the first stage of the Review, published in August 2006."

Details of the Project Board members are available on our website.

Further Information

The project team members are committed to ensuring all those with a legitimate interest in the progress and findings of the review are provided with the information they require in a timely manner. We welcome questions and comments and will continue to provide regular updates.

Should you require further information, or wish to become involved in the pilot phase of the review, please e-mail your interest to info@TheCarterReview.com or phone The Project Office on 020 7270 5289.