How healthcare in England looks a year after “liberation”

By Maureen O’Sullivan, MRPharmS

A national approach

NHS England has taken responsibility for commissioning specialised services, offender healthcare and some services for the armed forces. It is also in charge of the national community pharmacy contract and other primary care contracts. There are 27 area teams that co-ordinate pharmacy contract and other primary care commissioning functions. There are now 221 clinical commissioning groups across England that commission NHS services for local populations. They hold £56bn of the £96bn NHS commissioning budget and replace many of the commissioning functions formerly carried out by primary care trusts. A “framework of excellence” is in the process of being developed that aims to identify what excellent clinical commissioning practice is so that it remains consistent across all CCGs.

CCGs find their feet

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Five specialised programmes

There are five programmes of care for specialised services commissioning. They are:
- Internal medicine
- Cancer and blood
- Mental health
- Trauma
- Women and children

Standards launched to help pharmacists talk to patients

In March 2014, the Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education and HEE published “Consultation skills for pharmacy practice”. The standards and accompanying tools are designed to help all pharmacy professionals refine how they talk with their patients.

Pharmacist numbers scrutinised

The Higher Education Funding Council for England and HEE produced a report in September 2013 looking at controlling the number of pharmacy graduates entering the workforce and put three options out for consultation. A report on the outcome of the consultation is due later in 2014.

Clinical academic funds for pharmacy

National Institute for Health Research/HEE clinical academic research funding has been made available to pharmacists at master’s and PhD level.

Workforce at a glance

The new workforce includes:
- Over 1,000 employers
- 1.3 million employees
- Over 300 different types of job
- £5bn worth of investment

HEE investment plan published

In December 2013 the first HEE workforce plan set out how much money will be invested in education and training programmes across the whole NHS workforce starting from September 2014. Four fewer preregistration pharmacist training positions are available in 2014/15.

Values-based recruitment has been identified as a key priority in the NHS HEE mandate for 2013-15. By 2015 all applicants to HEE-funded training posts will undergo values testing as part of the recruitment process.

LETBs take shape

There are now 13 local education and training boards across England that are responsible for the local training and development of healthcare professionals.

Disbanded agencies absorbed by PHE

The formation of PHE brought together over 70 organisations. Functions of the Health Protection Agency and the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse came into PHE after the agencies were formally wound up.

PHE’s front door open

There are 15 local PHE centres that are described as being the “front doors” to the organisation. They provide public health advice, support and services at a local level.

Medicines optimisation receives a boost

An overarching medicines optimisation clinical reference group has been established to work across all the other CRGs and support specialist commissioning of high-cost medicines. Chaired by Clare Howard, deputy chief pharmaceutical officer at NHS England, the group has already produced a set of principles on gain share arrangements for non-tariff high-cost medicines.

CSUs join competitive market

Commissioning support units provide support to CCGs and NHS England, but not exclusively. Local and national commissioners have a choice as to what commissioning support service to use. However, with a combined income of £750m, CSUs are currently dominating the market. A year ago there were 23 CSUs and there are now 17 — each must be viable and autonomous by 2016, which is why some smaller CSUs are merging with larger ones or being hosted by nearby CCGs.

NHS England calls pharmacy to action

In December 2013, NHS England put out a community pharmacy “call to action” asking pharmacists and other healthcare professionals to share how they think pharmacy services could be reshaped to improve out-of-hospital care and the management of patients with long-term conditions. The consultation ended on 18 March 2014 and a strategic outline is expected to be published later in the year.

National awareness campaign highlights pharmacy

A £3m national awareness campaign was launched in January that encourages people to seek advice early if they are feeling unwell. The “earlier the better” campaign has a strong focus on raising the profile of community pharmacy services and was the first national campaign of its kind to be launched by NHS England.

Pharmacy and Public Health Forum makes its mark

The Pharmacy and Public Health Forum, established in 2011 by pharmacy minister Earl Howe, now reports directly to PHE. Major outputs of the forum so far this year include:
- Publication of a progress report on developing and consolidating the evidence base for community pharmacy’s contribution to public health
- Production of professional standards for public health practices for pharmacy in partnership with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society

A new friend for pharmacy

PHE intends to become a “champion and friend” to pharmacy, according to Kevin Fenton, director of health and wellbeing at PHE. Speaking at a public health in pharmacy event in January, Professor Fenton said that PHE wants to develop a strategic partnership with pharmacy and that it would be investing in efforts to do this.

Pharmacy adviser appointed

In January 2014, Gill Foulds, principal pharmaceutical officer at the Department of Health, started working as the pharmacological public health adviser in PHE’s health improvement directorate.