

NATIONAL VOICES ANNUAL CONFERENCE

How people power will shape the new health & social care system

Liz Kendall MP, Shadow Minister for Care and Older People

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INTRODUCTION

What about people power?

Only National Voices would make this crucial question the focus of its annual conference – which is why I'm delighted to be here today.

And it is right that you're asking the question, particularly at this time.

Let me explain why.

Just before Christmas I was at an annual get-together of many of the senior 'movers and shakers' in the NHS.

A couple of hours in, I started to feel a bit uncomfortable. It took me a little while to figure out why.

Then I realised.

All the focus was on how to make the Government's complicated new NHS structures work – not about to transform care and put the people who use services in the driving seat of change.

It was as if these senior figures had gone through all the pain and agony of the Government's reorganisation – and heard the mantra about “no decision about me without me” – but were in reality carrying on pretty much as before.

Of course, it is not like this everywhere.

We've all seen countless examples of services that are striving to put patients, users and their families at the heart of what they do, and many passionately committed staff who want to ensure people become partners in their care.

But too many parts of the system still think its up to them to 'give' patients certain roles, rather than fundamentally changing what they do so people can take power for themselves.

And I don't believe the Government's reorganisation or their other policies will transform the quality and experience of care, and make people power a reality.

Healthwatch

Take Healthwatch, which the Government consistently claims will be a strong champion for patients and the public across NHS and social care services.

I don't doubt the commitment of the Chair, Anna Bradley, to try and make national Healthwatch work.

But it simply doesn't have the power and authority of the three big players in the NHS – the Commissioning Board, the Care Quality Commission and Monitor.

It's not fully independent - it's a sub-committee of the CQC - and it doesn't have anywhere near the same levers to pull, or incentives to use, to drive changes in the system.

This problem is mirrored locally.

The Government has pulled out all the stops to ensure CCGs are fully functioning by April this year. They've been running in shadow form for months and are being made to go through a centrally driven authorisation process.

In stark contrast local HealthWatch are barely off the starting block in large parts of the country.

I conducted a Freedom of Information survey of local authority plans for Healthwatch in December.

A third of councils who responded could not confirm they will have a fully functioning Healthwatch by 1st April this year – as the legislation requires.

Many councils still haven't signed contracts with organisations to run HealthWatch, and some say it will be months before they are properly up and running. Two thirds don't yet know if they will subcontract any of the statutory functions of Healthwatch because contracts are still out to tender.

Can you imagine if a third of CCGs weren't going to be fully functioning by April? It simply wouldn't have been allowed to happen – so why tolerate it for patients and the public?

And if local councils, hospitals and GPs don't know who will be responsible for all the different Healthwatch functions – like representing patient and users views when local services are being developed, raising alarm bells if there concerns about care providers and providing patients with advice if things go wrong - what chance do ordinary members of the public have?

The Government has been so focused on trying to make the its backroom reorganisation work, it has neglected the very organisations that are supposed to provide a strong collective voice for patients and the public – at precisely the time this is desperately needed because of all the pressures on services and changes in the system.

Patient Experience

The Government's plans to put the experience of individual patients and their families at the heart of the NHS are also striking for their lack of vision and ambition.

I welcome the Friends and Family test, as far as it goes. But it only asks whether patients would recommend an NHS service to others.

It won't explain the reasons for patients' views, or provide the detailed, real time feedback on their experience of individual services that patients want and NHS staff need to improve standards of care.

We need much more powerful ways of putting the experience of users and their families at the heart of the system.

I'm sure virtually everyone in this room has used TripAdvisor to book a hotel room.

Of course deciding which NHS or care service you want to use isn't the same as choosing a hotel, but the underlying principle – that people want to know what those who have used a service think about it – is going to become increasingly important in future.

There's lots of really exciting developments in this area, like Patient Opinion. Patient Opinion allows patients to tell the story of their NHS experience online, in writing or on the phone.

It is a really powerful tool for patients to tell their story and find out what others have said about a service, and for local staff to get the feedback they need to tackle poor standards of care. It gives patients a voice, and staff a powerful incentive to improve in a simple, easy and cost effective way.

Patient Opinion is about to launch Care Opinion so that people who use adult social care services can also share their experiences. The two will be fully integrated so that NHS and social care staff will be able to see what users and their families are saying about their care.

I've written to all MPs in England encouraging them to register with Patient Opinion to find out what patients are saying about NHS services in their constituency, and suggesting they ask their local hospitals, mental health services, GPs, clinical commissioning groups and councils to do the same.

Need for more fundamental change

Developments like Patient and Care Opinion will make a big difference.

But far more fundamental changes are needed if we're going to meet the needs of patients, users and their families and make people power a reality in the century of the ageing society.

Last week Andy Burnham launched Labour's Health and Care policy review, which I have been give the honour of leading.

The key question we are asking is: is it time for the full integration of health and social care?

One budget, one service, co-ordinating all of a person's needs: physical, mental and social.

A service that starts with what people and their families want and is built around them and with them.

So instead of constantly trying to make three separate systems work together – which we're still trying to do after the Government's reforms - we instead create a single system to achieve whole person care.

Making this vision a reality raises huge questions.

How do we commission for good population health - making the vital links with housing, education and employment – instead of continuing to commission predominantly for health services and individual diseases?

What are the entitlements patients, users and the public might have – individually and collectively - in a fully integrated system?

Should district general hospitals evolve over time into fundamentally different organisations - integrated care providers from home to hospital - to finally shift the focus of services towards prevention?

How can we get financial incentives where they need to be – for example through a year of care budget – to help people stay fit, healthy and living independently in their own homes?

One of the really important issues we need to look at is education, training and skills.

We will always need doctors and nurses who can treat and cure individual diseases.

But in an ageing society with the huge increase in long-term, lifestyle related illnesses NHS and social care staff must also know how to help people be as healthy as possible, for as long as possible, and to manage their own health and conditions.

Francis Bacon said “knowledge is power”. To which Kofi Annan adds “information is liberation and education is the premise of progress in every society and every family”.

We have finally got to make this a reality for patients, users and their families. Doctors would never dream of sending patients home without a prescription for the drugs they need, yet thousands of people still don’t get the information and support that is essential to their health and wellbeing.

As Andy said last week, we don’t yet have all the answers about how to make this vision a reality.

We want and need to create the policy together – and put our commitment to the principle of people power into practice in our own policy review.

So over the next six months we will be holding events in every region of the country seeking people’s views on two key questions.

First, do you see merit in this vision of whole person care and support the proposals for the full integration of health and social care?

Second, if you do, how far down this path of integration do you think we should go?

I want National Voices and its members to be at heart of these discussions, helping us build an ambitious and achievable policy, and a genuine movement for change.

Conclusion

Your role has never been more important.

This time next week we'll know the results of the Francis Inquiry into Mid Staffordshire Hospital. There will be serious lessons for all parts of the NHS to learn from the Inquiry, including politicians.

Whatever recommendations are made, it is absolutely essential that the views and experiences of patients and their families are heard loudly and clearly from the bedside to the Boardroom and at the heart of Whitehall too.

Effective monitoring and regulation of NHS and social care services really matters, but regulators can't be everywhere, all the time.

Patients and their families are, which is why we must ensure they have a stronger and more powerful voice in all parts of the NHS and at every level of the system.

National Voices and all its members have an absolutely crucial role to play in ensuring this happens. I hope we can work together to make genuine people power a reality in the months and years ahead.