



RCN Policy Briefing

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The Piloting of Personal Health Budgets in England

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Introduction

This briefing will provide a short introduction to the possible role of Individual Budgets within health care. The Department of Health in England is planning to begin a pilot programme on personal health budgets in early 2010¹. This follows on from Lord Darzi's NHS Next Stage Review which pledged to pilot personal health budgets in selected areas as a way of giving patients greater control over the services they receive. The concept of individual budgets for health divides opinion. For some it is a long awaited solution for giving greater control and choice for patients, but for others it is a step too far that challenges the very foundations of the NHS. This document is intended to provide an overview of the main issues for this system of healthcare

Experiences from Social Care on Individual Budget Pilots²

Although healthcare budgets are a new concept, individual budgets (IBs) for social care were piloted in 13 Local Authority areas in England in 2005-06. The pilots examined the experiences of a sample of 959 people in all groups of service users purchasing care through individual budgets.

The report found that people with individual budgets generally felt more in control of their lives. It also found that generally the costs for both individual budgets and conventional care were broadly comparable, however there were some differences in individual client groups. Older people did not appear to fare as well with IBs as other groups and the costs were slightly higher. One important finding of the study was that major shifts in staff and organisational culture were needed to implement IBs in the pilot sites.

The RCN will be calling for the lessons from the social care experience to be taken on board during the piloting of personal health budgets.

What is the pilot programme for personal health budgets?

The Government has made a clear commitment to piloting personal health budgets over the next three years with a view to rolling them out nationally should they prove successful. The pilots will draw on the experience of other health systems and in social care.

The timetable for the pilots is as follows:

March 2009

This was the deadline for pilot applications,

personal budgets work for healthcare." It is expected that patients with long-term conditions, those receiving care under the NHS continuing care system and users of mental health services are likely to be included in the pilot programmes.

Why are personal health budgets being piloted?

The main idea behind personal health budgets is as follows:

- The Government believes that if patients have a personal budget it will enable them to personalise their own care to suit them which will give people a choice and control over how they access and receive care;
- Patients who have personal health budgets should also have a personal care plan. This will make care assessment quicker and easier and ensure that individuals are required to give out the same information fewer times;
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nurse-patient relationship. For example personal health budgets may encourage patients to request from nurses a form of care delivery that is not evidence based.

2) Organisational and employment issues

The direct purchasing of services by patients will have a fundamental effect on NHS organisational structures and culture. There are significant issues to be addressed on employment stability, variations in pay for workers employed by users, and complicated regulatory and professional issues arising out of direct employment by members of the public³. In the short to medium term, with likely reductions in funding for the NHS from 2011, this could become an attractive proposition for Government when seeking to reduce costs, as services could go to 'third or independent sector providers' who may not employ nurses on NHS pay and conditions of service.

3) NHS model

There are significant issues around the knowledge and skills of nurses and their skills to support individuals wit

However the RCN has a number of questions and significant issues that it will be raising during the piloting of personal health budgets as follows:

- How will patients ensure they are purchasing care from individuals with the

Conclusion

The College believes it is critical that patients have access to reliable information for them to make informed choices