

Commissioning of wheelchair services – CCGs working to improve health outcomes for patients, reduce delays and save costs

1) Current issues

- Historically commissioning of wheelchair services has suffered from delays and a low priority, which has had adverse impacts on the health outcomes for both young disabled people and disabled adults. The current wheelchair commissioning arrangements must improve to ensure that commissioners can meet the needs of their patients who require wheelchairs.
- At the moment we know that:
 - Wheelchair services do not currently provide a good patient experience. The approach is not person-centred enough and poor communication to users is ending up costing services more as there are higher 'did not attend' rates and complaints to management as a result of dissatisfaction.
 - Disabled children and young people are on waiting lists without any equipment or with an ill fitting wheelchair for too long – on average its two years, and in many cases longer.
 - All services share the same eligibility criteria but wheelchair services apply this in varying ways across the country, resulting in very variable service for disabled children and young people.
 - Young disabled people and adults aren't being given appropriate mobility equipment that fits all their needs and allows them to be independent. For children and young people, often they still need to be pushed around by an adult as it is rare to be able to secure a powered chair via the NHS.
 - Often contract specifications for wheelchairs are pulled together based on minimal data and limited by budgets which are not reviewed against the actual historical need. This results in poor quality services and contracts which do not promote and reward innovation.

2) Why does commissioning need to change?

- There are a range of long term health and economic benefits to providing appropriate mobility equipment. For example the right wheelchair can prevent disabled children and adults from developing pressure sores. It could potentially save hospitalisation at a cost on average of £4,000, and even spinal surgery that can carry a cost of £40,000.
- The NHS is losing out on major cost savings by working inefficiently in this area, and with innovative and creative thinking, the use of technology, clever procurement and a focus on the customer it is possible to drive up clinical outcomes in wheelchair services as well as reduce costs
- Whizz-Kidz has identified some potential and high impact solutions to support the NHS and commissioners to deliver better outcomes for wheelchair users and cost savings. This includes online applications, a 'Chair in a Day' model, and mobile assessments and delivery.
- Whizz-Kidz's partnership approach with the NHS in Tower Hamlets saved £250k in its first year by driving down costs and increasing efficiency. Another NHS partnership saved nearly £100k.
- By commissioning wheelchair services in a more patient-centred way, CCGs can affect major benefits to the economy. A report by Frontier Economics demonstrated Whizz-Kidz's Social Return on Investment and showed that for every £1 spent by the charity on the appropriate wheelchair, between £10 and £65 is generated for the economy as young people gain increased independence and can take up more education and employment opportunities.

3) How can you commission differently and hold NHS wheelchair services to account?

- **Decide outcome measures for service and tender on outcomes, not price. Identify KPIs and use levers like CQUIN.** All too frequently, tendering on price drives providers to deliver poor equipment and service. Greater time spent at the front end engaging with providers through a competitive dialogue approach produces the best outcomes. Following the national wheelchair summit in February, work is on-going to develop a service specification for wheelchair services based on good practice examples from across the country. Once produced, it will be shared with commissioners throughout the system.
- **Commission in a patient-centred way** to drive up patient satisfaction – understand what the local need is by involving patients throughout the commissioning process; use technology such as online referral systems and extended opening hours where possible; introduce online 'rate and reviewing' of service levels and equipment; and implement mobile solutions to take the service into the community
- **Identify costs, waiting lists, and links in supply chain.** It's important that services are commissioned in such a way that they understand their commercials with a much more business centred approach. Understanding supply, demand, cost and where services sit within a supply chain will allow sensible cost-effective decision-making based on facts, it will also mean you can identify where the delays might be and how to avoid them in the future. This in turn will draw greater value out of the supply chain in terms of savings, stock holding, training and support etc.
- **Demand innovation to enhance quality outcomes and reduce costs.** Some of the innovation Whizz-Kidz has introduced includes:
 - a) Chair in a Day – assessment and provision of equipment on the same day, made possible by upfront clinical decision making and close ties to the supply chain
 - b) Innovative Procurement – control of cost through use of a product matrix and clinical staff access online 'Amazon' style ordering
 - c) Technology – Tablet computers for staff and use of mobile App technology to make application quicker and easier and also allow sight of clinical notes through a secure network
 - d) Service Innovation – by streamlining services and procurement we see a reduction in waiting times, improvement in mobility and independence, and cost effectiveness of the budget. A good user experience must also be recorded through reduction in complaints and high levels of satisfaction.

4) Wheelchair commissioning working well - Whizz-Kidz in Tower Hamlets – a case study

In 2007, working against a backdrop of high unemployment, a large population of disadvantaged minorities and an above average caseload, the aims of Whizz-Kidz and NHS Tower Hamlets CCGs' joint venture were to improve overall services and ensure that children and young people received the equipment most appropriate to their needs – and quickly.

Dr Sam Everington, Chair NHS Tower Hamlets CCG said:

"Whizz-Kidz is an example of a provider that puts patient right at the front, delivering a first class service with superb outcomes and reduced costs. If you met their children ambassadors you would be bowled over and humbled. Their service challenges all of us as commissioners to ask the question why we all do not review our current services."

The results:

Users of the wheelchair service in Tower Hamlets received better quality wheelchairs, at lower cost, with shorter waiting times. The response from healthcare professionals and service users was overwhelmingly positive. We've:

- Saved £250k in the first year
- Initially eradicated the waiting list, and subsequently reduced waiting times
- Reduced costs by 60%

- Enabled 70% of wheelchair users to take their equipment home on the day of their assessment, through our Chair in a Day model
- Significantly improved satisfaction ratings from service users
- Demonstrated a significant social return on investment
- Won a Health and Social Care Award

How we did it:

Working in partnership with NHS Tower Hamlets CCG the Whizz-Kidz way of working was applied, which resulted in:

- Creating a flexible approach to the application of eligibility requirements
- Providing specialised assessments by mobility therapists
- Introducing streamlined processes to save money and time and vastly reducing admin time
- Working with our corporate partner Tesco to implement more effective procurement
- Driving innovation with the help of corporate partners like Accenture

Alwen Williams, Chief Executive, London and City Alliance NHS (former CEO of NHS Tower Hamlets) said:

'Whizz-Kidz has made an indelible mark in Tower Hamlets, transforming the entire wheelchair service. Collaboratively, Whizz-Kidz and the Tower Hamlets team have managed to generate significant savings and develop a swifter approach to assessment with enhanced clinical outcomes and a high customer satisfaction rate. But more importantly, through 'Chair in a Day' we've enabled many more adults as well as children and young people to lead more independent lives.'