

Commissioning Directorate

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**Response to written questions regarding audiology for NHS Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 14 December 2007**

**1. Whether the following "milestone" diagnostic target is being achieved for audiology: *by March 2007, no-one should wait more than 13 weeks for diagnosis.***

This target was not being met by either of West Kent PCT's NHS audiology providers by March 2007.

**2. Whether the following "milestone" diagnostic target will be achieved for audiology: *by March 2008, no-one should wait more than six weeks for diagnosis.***

We have commissioned services to ensure that no one will be waiting for longer than six weeks from referral to diagnosis by the end of March 2008.

**3. Whether it is intended that routine (non-ENT) audiology referrals will conform to the 18-week referral-to-treatment maximum wait standard by the end of 2008 (although these referrals are not formally covered by the 18-week RTT maximum waiting target).**

Routine (non-ENT) audiology referrals will conform to the 18 week referral to treatment maximum wait standard by December 2008.

**4. What the level of unmet need for audiology services (including analogue-to-digital upgrades) is and how this has been estimated – and whether current procurement plans will be sufficient to address this.**

On the basis of Medway NHS Trust's own business plan, West Kent PCT commissioned additional treatments to secure the delivery of the target waiting time. This plan includes both first fit and analogue to digital hearing aid patients who are on the waiting list and will ensure that the need for audiology services is fully met.

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust have provided West Kent PCT with a breakdown of their current waiting lists, identifying those patients who will transfer to Clinicenta and those who will remain under the care of the Trust. West Kent PCT has worked with MTW to estimate the level of additional activity required, which is being procured from Clinicenta and will ensure the Trust meets the waiting time targets for all patients.

**5. Whether providing upgrades to digital hearing aids for patients who already have analogue hearing aids is as important a priority as providing hearing aids for new patients.**

Patients requiring upgrades to digital hearing aids are assessed with the same level of priority as those patients requiring a first fit hearing aid.

## **6. Regarding the recent cross-PCT Clinicenta audiology procurement for South East Coast:**

- **Why the procurement allows for additional provision in the south of West Kent but not Dartford and Gravesham.**

The Medway NHS Trust, which provides audiology services for Dartford, Gravesend and Swanley locality, is confident that they will manage the waiting lists and deliver the required increases in activity to meet the waiting time targets. On this basis it was unnecessary to procure additional activity from Clinicenta for this locality.

Medway has further reassured the PCT that they are able to deliver increased activity via additional services, which could be provided at Gravesend Community Hospital. To this end we are in negotiations with the Medway NHS Trust. The additional services would take both direct access patients ie referred by their GPs and provide a supporting service to ENT clinics held at Gravesend Community Hospital. It is envisaged that this service development will commence early next year subject to contractual arrangements.

- **How the procurement came about and what the respective roles of the PCTs, the SHA and the DoH's Commercial Directorate were in bringing it about.**

SEC SHA co-coordinated the local procurement up to the point when the contract was signed (by PCTs). Legal and commercial expertise was provided by the DH Commercial Directorate.

- **How the procurement relates to the government's previously-announced plan to procure centrally 300,000 Independent Sector audiology pathways p.a. over five years.**

The contract was procured by PCTs in South East Coast SHA following the decision not to proceed with the larger Wave 2 Independent Sector Diagnostic Procurement for SEC. Clinicenta had been appointed Preferred Bidder for that scheme and was then contracted to provide audiology services to address local need. The volumes contracted are broadly consistent with SEC's share of the 300,000 Independent Sector pathways over five years.

- **What the effect of the procurement is likely to be on NHS audiology providers, given the fears expressed by some that the planned central Independent Sector audiology procurement could destabilise NHS audiology departments (which provide a much wider range of services).**

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust have been fully involved in the work up to the transfer of patients from their waiting lists. The initiative is about meeting the unmet demand rather than removing activity, which the Trust could have addressed themselves. The PCT have entered into the agreement with Clinicenta to provide a responsive service to patients waiting for a digital hearing aid, whilst continuing to commission the same level of activity from NHS audiology departments.

Currently, the standards applied in contracts with Independent Sector providers are more detailed and specific than those with NHS providers. It is our intention to apply

these standards across all providers. The PCT believes that contracting based on high standards, along with the introduction of more choices for patients will inevitably drive up the quality of care across the board.

- **How the contract addresses the following issues:**
  - **quality, repair and maintenance of hearing aids;**
  - **continuity of care**

The contract covers a two year period from October 2007 with the potential to extend the contract thereafter. Patients seen within this time will receive as many audiological follow ups as deemed clinically necessary and will be able to ring into the service and make an appointment to have repairs and ongoing maintenance if required. At the end of the contract the ongoing care of the patient and maintenance/repair of the aids will transfer to either Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust or another suitable provider (this may indeed be Clinicenta, dependant on need and success of this provider.

Patient surveys and other methods (e.g. 'secret shopper') will be undertaken to ensure their experience is taken into account throughout the period to both inform contract review and future provision.

For MTW, patients would be referred into the Trust service by their GPs, which is consistent with the current referral pathway.

It is important to remember that patients with digital hearing aids will expect a re-fit assessment every three years. These arrangements will be built into future contracts with all providers.

- **onward referral of cases requiring a specialist opinion;**
- **follow-up care for patients with complex needs;**

Patients on the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Trust waiting list are validated for their suitability to be treated by Clinicenta. These will be patients who are waiting for a digital hearing aid and who require an assessment and fitting of the aid. It is unlikely that these patients will require onward referral as they do not have complex audiological needs. Any such patients would be screened out prior to referral to Clinicenta to ensure they receive the appropriate service at Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Trust.

- **clinical governance;**

There are clear clinical standards described in the contract specification for Clinicenta.

To meet clinical governance standards, Clinicenta will ensure that every Staff member involved with the provision of the Services:

- receives proper and sufficient training and instruction in accordance with Good Clinical and Good Healthcare Practice and the standards of their relevant professional body, if any, in the execution of their duties; and
- receives full and detailed appraisal in terms of performance and on-going education and training in accordance with Good Clinical and Good Healthcare Practice and the standards of their relevant professional body if any.

In addition, Clinicenta, is required to feedback patient experience to the PCTs through surveys (where appropriate), complaints and complements, as well as incident reporting.

- **sharing of patient records with NHS audiology services;**

When sharing patient records the PCTs and Clinicenta acknowledge their respective duties under the DPA and FOIA and comply with their obligations and duties under the said Acts.

Clinicenta shall in providing the Services comply with the following as from time to time amended or replaced:

- the Confidentiality Code of Practice for NHS Staff;
- the NHS Code of Practice on Confidentiality;
- protecting and Using Patient Information (A Manual for Caldicott Guardians);
- the NHS Information Governance Toolkit; and South East Coast PCTs and Clinicenta - Adult Hearing Aid Services
- in accordance with the principles of the security management standard BS 7799-2.
- **patient selection (whether this will be done through Patient Choice; whether those on waiting lists will be seen first**

Patients who are considered to be clinically suitable for transfer from the waiting lists of Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Trust will be offered the opportunity to access the Clinicenta service. These patients will be seen first. West Kent PCT has procured an additional level of activity starting in April 2008 through to September 2009 to take patients directly referred from their GPs, therefore offering wider choice.

- **staffing and "additionality" (given concerns around possible "poaching" of staff from NHS services).**

Clinicenta have recruited their current workforce through agencies and through advertising on the British Audiological Society website and journal. The PCT contracts with Clinicenta do not have an additionality clause relating to recruitment of staff from the NHS.