

Directorate of Commissioning

Report on Audiology Services

The following timeline gives a high level summary of work undertaken by West Kent PCT to improve audiology services over the last 8 months. The attachment shows the PCT's response to the HOSC's detailed action sheet.

November 2007: West Kent PCT recognised the need to improve Audiology services. Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust had at this time 1380 patients on the Audiology Waiting List, with waiting times for hearing assessments at Kent and Sussex Hospital, 14 months and at Maidstone Hospital 12 months.

The PCT made a decision to invest an additional £480k into Audiology Services and contracted alternative providers to assist Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust in clearing the backlog of patients.

March 2008: By March 2008 alternative providers (Clinicenta, Specsavers, 21st Century Hearing Centre), and additional capacity at MTW had provided assessments for 574 patients and 386 of these patients had received digital hearing aids.

The PCT invested further funding in order to achieve the 6 week diagnostic target by the end of March 2008 and an additional 474 patients were seen.

March – June 2008: Further progress has been made and a total of 1050 patients have received hearing assessments with 900 patients receiving Binaural aids and 90 with single aids. 60 of this number either did not attend their appointments or did not require hearing aids.

Currently the number of patients on the Audiology Waiting List stands at 608 with no patients waiting longer than 6 weeks to be seen.

Having achieved a significant reduction in the number of patients waiting, the PCT is now in a position to begin to offer direct access, in a managed and gradual way allowing for GPs to directly refer their patients to Clinicenta so that patient will receive a hearing assessment within 6 weeks, and when required hearing aids within a further 3 weeks.

The PCT has established a robust performance system and the pathway is now well within the 18 week treatment target, achieving a significant improvement overall in Audiology services for West Kent patients.



Response by West Kent PCT to the Kent County Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Action Sheet: Audiology – Minute Reference 72, 14
December 2007

NHS (or other) body concerned – Eastern & Coastal Kent PCT, East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust, Kent Adult Social Services, Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust, Medway NHS Foundation Trust and West Kent PCT

Deadline/ bring forward date – August 2008

Recommendation/ action point	Action taken to date
<p><i>The Committee concluded that:-</i></p> <p>(a) <i>further work needed to be done to inform the public of the new services being provided by Clinicenta;</i></p>	<p>The backlog of patients on the waiting list has nearly been eliminated and the PCT will shortly be in a position to open up Direct Access for patients.</p>
<p>(b) <i>work needed to be undertaken on transport issues in relation to accessibility of healthcare services (the Committee noted that this was a piece of work that it had set aside for a Topic Review Select Committee to undertake early in the New Year);</i></p>	<p>Transport arrangements have been made for audiology patients that meet the standard transport criteria.</p>
<p>(c) <i>the issue of the Joint strategic Needs Assessment should be picked up by the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in conjunction with both Health and Adult Social Care colleagues;</i></p>	
<p>(d) <i>Public Health colleagues should ensure (possibly using Kent TV) that the public were made aware of the risks to their hearing posed by prolonged exposure to loud music;</i></p>	
<p>(e) <i>data collection and collation for audiology services must be improved, to enable commissioners to commission services effectively;</i></p>	<p>MTW has agreed to install practice navigator IT system to assist in data collection which will significantly improve collation of data.</p>
<p>(f) <i>it needed to be recognised that dealing with a patient with audiology needs was about more than just fitting a hearing aid;</i></p>	<p>MTW are aware that treating patients with audiology needs is more than just fitting hearing aids and do refer patients to hearing therapy when appropriate.</p>
<p>(g) <i>patients were entitled to copies of their audiograms;</i></p>	<p>MTW have in the past provided audiograms and will do so when patients ask for them</p>
<p>(h) <i>audiology should be recognised as an important service in the strategic plans</i></p>	<p>Audiology has been recognised as an important service in several ways by the PCT.</p>

Recommendation/ action point	Action taken to date
<i>of the Primary Care Trusts;</i>	It is recognised as part of the improving access which is a national target whereby patients must be seen within 18 weeks and within this the 6 week diagnostic target. 18 week and diagnostic targets are included within the PCT operating plans.
<i>(i) Hi-Kent Kent provided a valuable and well-respected service;</i>	The PCT maintain an agreement with Hi-Kent and Continue to provide funding towards their work
<i>(j) further work should be undertaken by the Primary Care Trusts and others to see whether it might be feasible to provide audiology services through "High Street" practitioners (along the same lines as dental and optical services);</i>	High Street practitioners have already been included in providing additional capacity. Specsavers and 21 st Century hearing centres were contracted in March 2008 to assist in helping to reduce the waiting list. The PCT is aware of the need to provide care closer to home and for the need of plurality of services
<i>(k) the Healthcare Commission Annual Health Check should take account of RTT waiting times for audiology services;</i>	
<i>(l) a written report on audiology services should be received by the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee every four months;</i>	A system will be put in place to provide a 4 monthly Audiology report. Report to be provided by November 2008.
<i>(m) audiology patients should be subject to an automatic recall;</i>	Follow up and after care appointments are offered and patients can contact the Audiology department at anytime to make appointments.
<i>(n) as there had been no audit of audiology needs across the population of Kent, this needed to be undertaken as a matter of urgency;</i>	Audiology audit took place in March 2008 and a further audit in June 2008 took place.
<i>(o) patients should be encouraged to return hearing aids where they were no longer required or are not being used;</i>	Leaflets/Flyers to be given out or placed in GP practices and audiology practices with this information. September 2008
<i>(p) PCTs and others needed to consider carefully the mental health needs of people with hearing impairment.</i>	
RESOLVED that:- <i>(a) the conclusions of the Committee be conveyed to all those identified as having matters to take forward; and</i>	

Recommendation/ action point	Action taken to date
<i>(b) the Committee would expect an update on how these issues were being dealt with when it received the first written review of audiology services in four months' time.</i>	Topic provisionally scheduled for HOSC meeting, 18 July 2008