



The Specialist Services Liaison Group (SSLG)

The Specialist Services Liaison Group (SSLG) is a forum within which consultants representing Diabetes UK and the Association of British Clinical Diabetologists (ABCD) can discuss issues relevant to specialist diabetes services with the National Clinical Director for Diabetes, Sue Roberts. The group is chaired by Dr Jiten Vora (Liverpool) and the members are David Cavan (Bournemouth) and Jonathan Thow (York) representing Diabetes UK and Mark Savage (Manchester) and Peter Winocour (Hertfordshire) representing ABCD.

The group has now met four times and has set itself the challenge of providing practical support to specialist diabetes teams in ensuring they have a strong voice within local diabetes networks and Hospital Trusts, and in securing resources to strengthen the specialist service.

One of the group's first tasks was to identify the issues of concern for diabetes specialist teams, and given the realities of the modern NHS, what can be done to address these. Examples include the fact that many services felt they were under-resourced, and while 80% of NHS expenditure is now determined by PCTs, there was often little specialist care input into local NSF implementation groups. A subsequent survey by ABCD highlighted these same areas of concern, hence validating the initial work. The report of this survey can be found at: www.diabetologists-abcd.org.uk.

Multiple PCTs with differing agendas can lead to problems for specialist services, but the National Diabetes Support Team (NDST) have experienced that where there is effective service delivery, it is based on effective Diabetes Networks. The NDST now has Regional Programme Managers in each Strategic Health Authority area. They are available to support Diabetes Networks and have already been successful in resolving local difficulties. Contact details for the RPMs can be found at: www.diabetes.nhs.uk/The_Team/Team_members.asp.

A large area of work of the group is in clarifying the present and future multi-faceted role of the consultant diabetologist and the multidisciplinary team. A description of the clinical aspects of a consultant's role within diabetes is available at the Diabetes UK website at: www.diabetes.org.uk. Additional material is available via the Diabetes UK strategic alliance website, www.diabetesplanning.org. The ABCD website, www.diabetologists-abcd.org.uk, is also a source of information and policy documents, particularly with regard to Specialists' opinion and problems faced.

The group however feel this needs to be supplemented by more detailed work, which will follow several strands:

- A new project within the Department of Health (DH) to map a care pathway for the metabolic syndrome, to include the common co-morbidities associated with diabetes. This will detail the role of the specialist service at each stage of the pathway.
- A qualitative study to capture the opinions and perceptions of consultants about their specialist work, other responsibilities (eg acute medicine) and their local diabetes service.

- A larger questionnaire-based study (sponsored by ABCD and Diabetes UK) on current local diabetes service provision.
- Work with the DH to promote the concept of a “year of care” rather than single patient contacts, as the basis for the Payment by Results tariff. This will identify the components within different areas of diabetes care, including those for which the specialist team would be expected to take responsibility.
- Wider dissemination of the currently available support documents, such as Payment By Results, Practice-based Commissioning via the ABCD and Diabetes UK websites.

The group will also disseminate useful resources to help consultants understand the new NHS. Factsheets are available on www.networks.nhs.uk and www.nera.com. The group also aims to develop workshops to help consultants develop the skills necessary to influence local policy and investment to the benefit of their local services.

Finally, we describe two practical areas where national targets can be used to increase resources for local diabetes services.

Structured patient education must be in place by January 2006.

The DH recently released a report on patient education, including minimum criteria to be met to fulfil the NICE guidelines. The report provides a comprehensive account of the patient education programmes currently available in the UK, with contact details for information on programmes for both type 1 and type 2 diabetes. The report can be found at: www.diabetes.nhs.uk/Work_areas/Patient_education.asp#patient_education_DH_DUK.

It has also been announced that structured education programmes must be in place by January 2006. While type 2 programmes will generally be the responsibility of PCTs, we encourage all specialist services to work with their Trusts and PCTs to secure the resources needed to deliver structured education for type 1 diabetes.

An opportunity to develop inpatient services for people with diabetes

A national target has been announced for PCTs to reduce occupied bed days due to emergency admissions. People with diabetes account for 10% of all acute admissions, and have a significantly longer length of stay than those without diabetes. Several reports have shown that a dedicated nurse to oversee management of inpatients with diabetes can reduce length of stay by an average of three days. Applied across the country, this could account for 10% of the reduction required to achieve the target. A factsheet highlighting what specialist teams can do has been developed and is available at: www.diabetes.nhs.uk/Reading_room/Factsheets.asp.

We encourage specialist services to undertake process mapping of the inpatient journey for people with diabetes in their Trusts, and to demonstrate to PCTs how better support for inpatient care will help reduce length of stay.