

**WIRRAL COUNCIL**  
**HEALTH AND WELLBEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**  
**COMMITTEE**

22 MARCH 2011

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>HOMEOPATHY COMMISSIONING</b>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>NHS WIRRAL PROFESSIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</b>
<b>RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	
<b>KEY DECISION?</b>	<b>NO</b>

**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update for members on the commissioning plans of NHS Wirral for homeopathy.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S**

2.1 The Professional Executive Committee approved a recommendation not to commission homeopathic therapies subject to patient & public engagement, and to ensure that all NHS Wirral policies are consistent to this effect.

**3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

3.1 The scientific evidence relating to the efficacy of homeopathy treatments was recently reviewed at NHS Wirral's Professional Executive Committee (PEC) to inform consistent commissioning decisions.

**4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES**

4.1 Homeopathy is a 200-year old system of medicine that seeks to treat patients with highly diluted substances that are administered orally. It is claimed that homeopathy works by stimulating the body's self-healing mechanisms<sup>1</sup>. Homeopathic products should not be confused with herbal remedies. Some homeopathic products are derived from herbal active ingredients, but the important distinction is that homeopathic products are extremely diluted and administered according to specific principles. Homeopathic therapies do not include acupuncture.

4.2 Decisions on the use of homeopathy are left to the National Health Service (NHS)<sup>2</sup>. Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) are responsible for commissioning care services and are thus currently free to fund homeopathy<sup>2</sup>.

- 4.3 Currently, NHS Wirral has a block contract with Liverpool PCT for homeopathy to the value of £35,270 per year. This contract is due to expire on 31 March 2011. Due to the need to ensure a consistent commissioning approach, and at a time of change by the provider, the future of the service required review.
- 4.4 NHS Wirral has received seven letters (to 23 February 2011) from service users relating to homeopathy treatments. These refer to a range of conditions (skin condition, prostate cancer, asthma and osteoarthritis, a learning difficulty/behaviour condition, several complaints together and also chronic fatigue syndrome and insomnia). All seven letters praise the homeopathy services and treatments received<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, the Chairman of the '*North West Friends of Homeopathy*' has written to the PCT in support of homeopathic services on the Wirral, and asking for an overview of the patient consultation plans should the treatments be discontinued<sup>4</sup>. All letters have received a response with details that the PCT recognises that homeopathic care on the Wirral is valued by the patients receiving the care, and that the matter is currently under review due to changes being made by the provider of the homeopathy services.

- 4.5 The NHS Wirral complex case team have received general queries regarding homeopathy treatments; however the team have not received any formal letters regarding this area. These queries have related to:
- Two patients already in the system and receiving homeopathy treatment and their ongoing management – advice was given in line with the NHS Wirral procedures of low clinical priority (see sections 4.9 and 4.10) and they were informed also of the current review of homeopathy services.
  - One new potential referral - advice was given in line with the NHS Wirral procedures of low clinical priority (see sections 4.9 and 4.10).

### **Scientific Evidence for the Use of Homeopathic Products**

- 4.6 In February 2010, the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee reported in detail on the effectiveness of homeopathy and policies relating to homeopathy provision in the National Health Service.
- 4.7 Based on the current scientific evidence, the Select Committee concluded that:
- There is no evidence that homeopathy works beyond the placebo effect.
  - By providing homeopathy on the NHS, the Government runs the risk of appearing to endorse it as a working system of medicine.
  - There is also a danger that when doctors prescribe placebos, they risk damaging the trust that exists between them and their patients.
- 4.8 Other PCTs have also reviewed their commissioning arrangements for homeopathic therapies:
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- NHS West Kent undertook a high quality review of their homeopathy commissioning in 2007 and concluded that it did not represent value for money in the light of competing NHS funding priorities. NHS West Kent now does not fund routine homeopathy treatment
- Oxfordshire PCT Priorities Forum in February 2009 confirmed that because there was no conclusive evidence for the effectiveness of complementary therapies, and that Oxfordshire's health economy had to prioritise mainstream treatments for which there was evidence of effectiveness, the commissioning of alternative and complementary therapies (including homeopathy) was a low priority for Oxfordshire PCT
- Greater Manchester Medicines Management Group decided In July 2010 that the prescribing, referral or recommendation of homeopathy is a low priority for the NHS and cannot be supported.

### **Local NHS Policies**

4.9 The Cheshire and Merseyside Prior Approval Scheme Policy (June 2010) states that for homeopathy/acupuncture:

*“Based on recent Effective Health Care Reviews (Effective Health Care Vol. 7 York University) there is currently insufficient evidence to recommend homeopathy as a treatment for any specific condition or to warrant significant changes in the provision of homeopathy (in the NHS). The PCT will therefore not provide funding for individuals to receive homeopathic treatment as part of current care pathways or outside usual pathways...The PCT will not commit additional resources to extend the current service provision in primary care nor provide for alternative routes of access to homeopathy.”*

4.10 The NHS Wirral Commissioning Policy for Alternative and Complementary Therapies states:

*“Complementary medicine/alternative therapies are generally not funded by NHS Wirral. They are occasionally used as a treatment as part of a mainstream service care plan (e.g. as part of an integrated multidisciplinary approach to symptom control by a hospital based pain management team) and as such will be funded either as part of the PBR tariff or explicitly agreed in the SLA. On existing available evidence the PCT would not support referral outside the NHS for these services. Prior approval is required on a case by case basis by the PCT Health Treatment Panel for any requests outside the above criteria. The HTP will require proven evidence of effectiveness of the therapy, failure of conventional treatment and assurance concerning the training and qualifications of the proposed provider practitioners.”*

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## NHS Wirral conclusions

4.11 The Professional Executive Committee (PEC) of NHS Wirral:

- Noted the evidence regarding the lack of efficacy and cost-effectiveness of homeopathic therapies
- Approved a recommendation not to commission homeopathic therapies subject to patient & public engagement, and to ensure that all NHS Wirral policies are consistent to this effect
- Agreed the need for GP consortia to engage with patients and patient groups with support from the Director of Communications and Engagement.

## 5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

5.1 The key risk is that NHS Wirral fails to maintain its reputation as an evidence-based commissioning PCT.

## 6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 None

## 7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 The PCT is consulting affected patients and groups as well as wider stakeholders

Audience	Mechanism
LINK	To be invited to meeting
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Presentation to 22/3 committee.
North West Friends of Homeopathy	Electronic copy of doc for circulation to members/users on their database. Feedback via NHS Wirral website available  Open meeting to provide opportunity for discussion
Patients directly affected	Letter and invitation to open meeting Feedback via NHS Wirral website available
Patient Groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Voice of Wallasey</li><li>• Patient Matters</li><li>• Birkenhead Patient Council</li></ul>	Letter to chairs Presentation by GPs to patient groups and responses captured.
NHS Wirral membership	Hard copy of consult doc for circulation to database
MPs	Letter to members; topic at MP meetings
Other stakeholders	Electronic copy of consult doc for circulation to database
General Public	Local press coverage  Websites posting (NHS Wirral & Wirral Council)

Responses will be considered by the Professional Executive Committee of the PCT.

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## **8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS**

8.1 There are no direct implications

## **9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS**

9.1 There is no impact on the NHS workforce. There is a need to communicate the policy to relevant commissioning and provider staff.

## **10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 The scientific evidence base regarding homeopathy is an evolving field and may change in the future. The evidence base regarding homeopathy will need to be monitored regularly its commissioning policy reviewed accordingly. This is imperative as there may be challenges to the commissioning decision.

## **11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 We do not believe there are any discrimination issues, social inclusion or human rights implications.

11.2 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

(a) Is an EIA required?

No – NHS Wirral has considered this issue already following an EIA screening process. Given the lack of evidence on the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of homeopathic therapies, measuring the positive or negative impact is inappropriate at this time.

However, NHS Wirral will keep this under review during the consultation process and any issues arising will be considered.

## **12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 Not applicable

## **13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

13.1 Not applicable

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## APPENDICES

None

## REFERENCE MATERIAL

1. "What is homeopathy?" The Society of Homeopaths, [www.homeopathy-soh.org](http://www.homeopathy-soh.org) cited in Reference 2
2. House of Commons Science and Technology Committee (2010) Evidence Check 2: Homeopathy, Fourth Report of Session 2009–10, The Stationery Office, London.
3. Letters from service users (PCT references) – *Names removed for public disclosure.*
  - KD/JPH/2142
  - KD/JPH/2170
  - KD/JPH/2171
  - KD/JPH/2197
  - KD/SR/2291
  - KD/JPH/2302
4. Letter from the North West Friends of Homeopathy: KD/JPH/2189

## SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date