

Submission: Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS

Adfam is the national umbrella organisation working to improve the quality of life for families affected by drug and alcohol use. We do this by working with a network of organisations, practitioners and individuals who come into contact with the families, friends and carers affected by someone else's drug or alcohol use. We provide direct support to families through publications, training, prison visitors' centres, outreach work and signposting to local services, and work extensively with professionals and Government to improve and expand the support available to families.

Background information

Adfam was founded in 1984 by the mother of a heroin user who could not find the support she needed to deal with her unique set of problems. Since then Adfam has grown into the national umbrella organisation representing a growing and diverse network of community activists supporting families with multiple problems, and also works to represent families' interests in the wider drug sector through providing training, resources and information in this complex area.

The UK Drug Policy Commission has estimated that families suffer harms worth £1.8 billion per year, including excess healthcare costs¹. People affected by someone else's drug and alcohol use experience a multitude of physical and psychological health problems, including anxiety, depression and stress-related symptoms – for which they often present to GPs, but without identifying the real reasons behind this. Family members can also be affected by domestic violence, and are often victims of acquisitive crime from within the family. Despite these difficult circumstances, families save statutory services an estimated £750m through the provision of care and support for their loved ones, which would otherwise have to be borne by the state.

Family support organisations are integral parts of the local communities in which they operate and their activities cross over with various government departments and initiatives – including healthcare, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, families and children, education and prevention, and criminal justice.

Adfam understands the need for real patient-centred care, local control of healthcare and true accountability for the services provided by the NHS. Changing the healthcare system to bring it closer to patients and more responsive to local need is an admirable plan, but this must deliver on what it promises – ensuring that local communities are listened to is vital, for example relating to local drug and alcohol issues which deserve the attention of the healthcare system.

¹ UKDPC, [*Adult family members and carers of dependent drug users: prevalence, social cost, resource savings and treatment responses*](#), 2009

Adfam has not offered comment for the *Regulating Healthcare Providers* section of the consultation.

Transparency in outcomes: a framework for the NHS

An outcomes system which meets the needs of local populations must not only concentrate on clear and obvious problems; in partnership with the local community, outcomes should also be established for tackling hidden issues and those which do not immediately present themselves – such as the impact of drugs and alcohol on family members.

The NHS Outcomes Framework put forward in the consultation document would apply to families affected by drug use in the ‘enhancing the quality of life for people with long-term conditions’ domain; this is also Adfam’s overall mission. As drug dependency commonly affects people for long periods of their lives, families also suffer the consequences for many years. Having – and often caring for – a family member with a drug problem can cause huge amounts of emotional, physical and financial strain, and symptoms such as anxiety, sleeplessness and depression are common, though families may not divulge the reasons behind this due to the stigma associated with problematic use of drugs and alcohol.

Adfam welcomes the document’s frequent pledges to support partnership work between the NHS and other bodies, particularly other public services and the voluntary sector. When combined with the localism agenda, this approach has the potential to bring about a system in which the health needs of the local population are fully mirrored in the services provided there. This partnership should include a full range of community organisations, including those providing support for families affected by drug and alcohol use.

Increasing democratic legitimacy in health

The consultation pledges to put power in the hands of ‘those who know what will work best in their local communities’, and this is definitely the case with services supporting families affected by drugs and alcohol. Families are at the forefront of addiction and know the problems it causes intimately – they are experts by virtue of experience. Local community services supporting families – for example with mental health needs such as anxiety and depression, and other holistic services like financial advice or bereavement counselling – know the needs of their constituents better than anyone, and this should be recognised. If localism is a priority and truly ‘one of the defining principles of this Government’, Adfam urges that local partners of all types are listened to and credited with the expertise they possess.

[Adfam has responded to various consultations released by the new Government](#) – for example on the carers’ strategy, policing and the drug strategy – and is urging local decision makers to account for the knowledge and expertise of the family support sector in drawing up responses to local issues related to drugs and alcohol. Areas of crossover include drug education (for example in local schools, or through parents’ groups); families and children, for instance working to prevent intergenerational drug use and minimise the harm of parental drug use; criminal justice, through better involvement

of families in the rehabilitation of drug-using offenders; and community safety. Healthcare is another area where Adfam believes family support services have much to offer.

Proposals relating to HealthWatch and its role as a 'citizen's advice bureau' recognise a common problem in health and social care responses at local level – referral pathways are not always as smooth as they should be, and people often have to try several different avenues before coming across a service that really offers to meet their needs. Adfam welcomes this initiative as a cost-effective way of removing common blocks in the system which are often due to a lack of mutual awareness between services.

Commissioning for patients

Adfam welcomes the proposal to bring decision-making closer to patients and local communities in terms of families affected by drug and alcohol use; their knowledge of local healthcare needs (including their own) is substantial. Family support providers would also prove invaluable partners in working to tackle drug and alcohol issues in the local community.

The consultation document states that new GP consortia will be able to 'buy in' support from external providers, including 'voluntary organisations...for instance to analyse population health needs'. This would provide an opportunity to learn from local independent organisations, which can act as an 'ear to the ground' to find out about a variety of local community health, mental health and also prison health needs – with the high volume of drug- and alcohol-misusing offenders, agencies supporting families often have contact with the criminal justice system.

More efficient partnership working at local level presents a huge opportunity to improve the success of services without having to commission new ones, and constantly inventing new responses to problems that are already being tackled. Adfam welcomes the recommendation that consortia work as closely as possible with their local communities and ensure that local needs are properly reflected in service provision. Family support providers, alongside treatment agencies and other organisations involved in tackling drug and alcohol problems, should be engaged as key partners in the community.

Further information

Please contact Vivienne Evans OBE, Chief Executive.

By post: 25 Corsham Street, London N1 6DR

Phone: 020 7553 7640

Email: policy@adfam.org.uk

Web: www.adfam.org.uk