Reducing the burden of data collection

The NHS Health and Social Care Information Centre

Summary

In a complex health and social care environment, performance information and monitoring are vital for managing local services effectively, while allowing national priorities to be set. Information is also needed for regulation, quality assurance, education and training, and health research.

The Health and Social Care Information Centre has a remit to deliver the information and knowledge vital to service delivery, while reducing the burden of data collection on local organisations, trusts, and councils responsible for social services.

It is committed to getting closer to the front line and balancing the needs of the workforce with the requirements of those making information requests.

The NHS Health and Social Care Information Centre is a new special health authority, formed on 1 April 2005. Established to streamline and co-ordinate data collections, it will also provide the information services needed to support NHS and local authority professionals.

This Briefing outlines the services, products and tools provided and planned by the Centre, and explains how these will benefit the NHS.

Background

The Health and Social Care Information Centre aims to have a positive impact on patient care by reducing the burden of data collection and making information more accessible, so cutting down on administration and form filling, and releasing front-line resources. It is looking at how it can improve feedback on data collected from the service and provide benchmarking services. Shared understanding and better communication between those who ask for data and those who collect data will provide a coherent approach and improve the information flow.

The Centre aims to be “the voice of the information community” and will guide information development through a strategic vision which takes into account the development of new technical systems such as mechanisms for collecting and analysing data. Overall, its aim is to make a difference to the work of the NHS and social care by providing support services that meet the information requirements of the people delivering care.
'The Health and Social Care Information Centre aims to provide a national knowledge base to co-ordinate information requirements and requests'

Services

The Health and Social Care Information Centre currently provides a range of services, including statistical functions, transferred from the Department of Health (DH), and information services, which have moved from the former NHS Information Authority.

In the future it will build and develop services to support performance monitoring, service planning and clinical governance. It aims to provide a national knowledge base able to co-ordinate and align information requirements and requests. It will support staff by dealing with Freedom of Information requests relating to the release of statistical data and analyses without additional work needing to be undertaken locally.

The Centre wants to take a lead on the development of information standards and will consult with the DH to ensure policy and data collection requests are aligned. It is working in close partnership with NHS Connecting for Health, the agency providing IT infrastructure for new health and care systems, and will provide the customer interface to the

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![Diagram](image-url)
Secondary Uses Service (SUS), enabling wide and comprehensive use of this extensive data warehouse.

Benefits to the NHS

The Health and Social Care Information Centre is expected to deliver the following benefits:

- helping strategic leadership of health and social care
- reducing the burden of data collections on front-line organisations
- improving the accuracy and credibility of information
- enhancing the usefulness and completeness of knowledge
- making the most of new technology
- supporting informed decision-making.

Early initiatives

The Information Catalogue

The Information Catalogue is a new service that gives details of current and future national data collections and the organisations sponsoring them. Details are available at www.ic.nhs.uk/infocat

By making this information accessible, the Health and Social Care Information Centre is avoiding potential duplication of data collection, so helping to reduce the burden on trusts’ information resources.

Services provided by the Health and Social Care Information Centre include:

- NHS clinical datasets service
- national analytical services, including analytical tools, support services and training
- national clinical audit support for conditions, including heart disease, diabetes and cancer
- casemix services
- NHS Care Record Secondary Uses Service (SUS) customer interface
- population and geography data services
- health informatics standards and networks
- work for the Healthcare Commission and the Commission for Social Care Inspection to support the star ratings system
- new NHS Omnibus sample survey
- review of central returns
- supporting primary care practitioners’ remuneration
- statistics for:
  - hospital episodes, including morbidity
  - ophthalmics, including sight tests, workforce, vouchers
  - social care, performance, finance and workforce
  - adult social care services
  - NHS workforce
  - general practice workforce information, vacancies and quality of care, including prevalence
  - lifestyle, including information about smoking and drinking
  - dental, including emergency dental services and remuneration
  - contraception and immunisation
  - community nursing
  - midwifery and maternity services
  - ambulance services
  - therapy services
  - cancer screening
  - mental health
  - population and geographic boundary
  - pharmacy and prescribing, including costs, volume and analysis.
If a trust is asked to provide information that duplicates existing collections, it can use the website to highlight such a request. The catalogue’s search facility also allows requesters of data to see what information is already available before requesting new data collections.

Reducing the burden on primary care
In August 2005 the Health and Social Care Information Centre is due to publish Quality and Outcome Framework (QOF) results for every GP practice in England and Scotland.

This data has been taken from the National Quality Management and Analysis System (QMAS) that computes QOF results for practices. QMAS is a new, unified, national IT system which gives GP practices and primary care trusts objective evidence and feedback on the quality of care delivered to patients.

There is a growing demand for information relating to quality of care, often via Freedom of Information requests made directly to primary care trusts, from a wide range of users including the DH, NHS trusts and organisations, patients and public, and academic researchers.

By providing a central source of information relating to primary care, the Centre is immediately reducing the front-line burden of dealing with requests for this type of information.

**NHS Omnibus Survey**
A new internet survey tool, the NHS Omnibus Survey, was introduced in April 2005. This is a regular, web-based survey that encompasses many currently separate collections, and which gives the option to add, change or drop whole surveys, sections or individual questions quickly and easily. While it is possible to conduct surveys of individuals or organisations with varying frequency, the intention is to run quarterly surveys in order to keep information collection demands on the NHS to a minimum.

The main criteria for information collections are to avoid duplicating existing systems (such as hospital episode statistics or the Strategic Executive Information System) and to not be unnecessarily complex. Samples of organisations are surveyed to provide reliable data about a range of health issues.

**Consultant Enquiry System**
The Consultant Enquiry System gives consultants direct access to a wealth of comparative information on admitted patient care delivered by NHS hospitals in England. Details from over 25 million hospital episode statistics records, covering the period April 2002 to March 2004, can be viewed online by staff who have the appropriate security clearance and a connection to NHSnet.

‘The Health and Social Care Information Centre provides tools to help the NHS improve its performance through the effective use of information’

More details are available at www.icServices.nhs.uk/ces

**Information Centre products and tools**
The Health and Social Care Information Centre provides a range of products and tools that help the NHS understand and improve its performance through the effective use of information for decision-making. These include:

**Performance Investigator**
Performance Investigator is a web-enabled application, developed with input from NHS users, that enables staff at all levels to use information effectively in decision-making.

Performance Investigator collects data from many sources, including annual hospital episode statistics, quarterly updates from the NHS-Wide Clearing Service (NWCS) and DH quarterly returns on all admissions in England.

Performance Investigator gives primary care trusts, acute trusts and strategic health authorities a single access point to national
comparative and performance data from all trusts in England, so enabling true national comparisons.

Users are able to run analyses on a range of areas including:

• activity – inpatient and day cases
• performance – length of stay, percentage of day cases, re-admissions, pre-operative waits, transfers
• costs – inpatient, day cases, excess bed-days
• access – waiting times, referrals, DNAs, cancelled operations.

For more information, see www.icservices.nhs.uk/performanceinvestigator

Mental health Performance Information Comparison System
The Performance Information Comparison System (PICS) is a web-based system that allows analysis of mental health data for monitoring and evaluation, service planning and benchmarking purposes.

To obtain a user ID and password to access the system, e-mail PICSQueries@doh.gsi.gov.uk, or for more information, visit www.icservices.nhs.uk/mentalhealth/dataset/pages/pics.asp

Key Indicators Graphical System
The Key Indicators Graphical System (KIGS) is a web-based comparative analysis and benchmarking tool for councils with social services responsibilities (CSSRs). Using graphs and tables, it allows indicators to be compared across councils, with regional and national averages, over time and with one another. It uses annual data from the Health and Social Care Information Centre, the Department for Education and Skills and other government departments, and is updated at intervals of one to three months as the main data sets that feed it are published. The majority of indicators are on a per head of population basis. KIGS has about 400 current indicators, including the 50 social services Performance Assessment Framework indicators.

Areas for future action
Following a series of workshops with front-line staff and the regulatory bodies, several areas have been highlighted by delegates for future consideration. These include:

Supporting front-line clinicians – engaging with front-line staff to explore and act on ways the Centre can reduce the burden of data collection and provide the information analysis services needed to support the care pathway; and providing insights into targets and diagnostic information services.

Data quality – this is high on the agenda as healthcare providers prepare to share data more widely or migrate data to the new systems being introduced through NHS Connecting for Health. Key areas for consideration include guidance on national definitions and input into the development of new IT systems to ensure they meet national and local information requirements.

Training and support – identifying where there is a need for guidance and support in the use of the Centre’s tools and services.

Customer commissioned services – providing additional services designed to meet local requirements, for example, performance monitoring and analytical services.

Practice-based commissioning – considering how to best support GPs as they move into financial management based around the practice.

Shared services – looking at ways capabilities and expertise can be shared and economies of scale achieved, for example, central procurement of licences for Ordnance Survey products.

Stakeholder engagement
In a complex health and social care environment, data collection and analysis has to be both...
intelligent and meaningful if it is to support decision-making and evidence-based activity. The Health and Social Care Information Centre is committed to on-going engagement with its customers to ensure it collects and makes available the information users want. A series of consultative workshops are under way.

The Centre has formed partnerships with NHS and social care professionals, and with regulators such as the Healthcare Commission, the Commission for Social Care Inspection and Monitor, which will influence the development of new information services to support better care.

Confederation viewpoint

The NHS Confederation welcomes the creation of the Health and Social Care Information Centre. We have held a number of meetings and workshops to ascertain what Confederation members are looking for from it.

One of the key concerns of Confederation members is the need to reduce the bureaucratic burden placed upon them by data returns. Members tell us that they consider less than half of the data collected is "useful locally"; that it often does not measure what’s important, such as clinical outcomes; and that often there is poor definition of what is required.

Other concerns expressed by our members include duplication of data requests, short notice and ad hoc requests and lack of feedback.

Our members are looking forward to working with the Health and Social care information Centre to ensure:

- better definitions of data required
- greater transparency of why data is required
- more accurate information
- information that is relevant to service providers
- more co-ordination of data requests
- a responsive information service.

For more information about the issues covered in this Briefing, contact gary.fereday@nhsconfed.org

Further information

The Health and Social Care Information Centre website:

www.ic.nhs.uk

Further copies can be obtained from:

NHS Confederation Publications
Tel 0870 444 5841 Fax 0870 444 5842
E-mail publications@nhsconfed.org
or visit www.nhsconfed.org/publications

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