

# Decisions of Value: summary of findings

The NHS needs, now more than ever, to find ways to balance the desire to improve quality of care with the pressure to reduce costs overall. This is a summary of the findings and work of a major project exploring how the NHS is meeting the biggest challenge facing it today.

Decisions of Value is a project led by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and the NHS Confederation that has spent six months studying what is influencing the decisions made in the NHS. It brings together a large amount of research to show how decisions impact on the value delivered and how this extends beyond Whitehall to the front line.

To gather our findings, we have undertaken research at three different levels. Firstly, we established direct local engagement through a series of site visits and interviews at four NHS organisations across the different sectors of the NHS. Secondly, we published a survey to get wider national engagement bringing together the views of almost 300 staff across all levels in the NHS. Finally, we conducted targeted expert and stakeholder engagement through a series of meetings and roundtables, as well as an academic literature review which was led by the University of Birmingham's Health Service Management Centre.

The study does not focus on national policy or individual clinical decisions, but rather on those decisions in the middle of the spectrum aimed at making the most of the capacity and functions of individual organisations. This includes, for example, decisions to embark on cost or service improvement plans and decisions to increase or decrease workforce levels.

Overall, our findings emphasise the importance of cultural, rather than structural, shifts in healthcare towards delivering better value and where this relies on having the right relationships, behaviours and environments in place. It presents insights into how people interact in the NHS and the crucial factors affecting how they operate within a particular context.

In many cases, what we find indicates a 'back to basics' approach that involves a fundamental understanding of how humans interact and operate. As such, it doesn't define good decisions, but rather gives an insight into the principles of good decision-making.

## Three key messages

- 1 Cultural shifts are essential to facilitate better decision-making and enable the right relationships, behaviours and environments upon which decisions are made.
- 2 Strong clinical and financial engagement improves decision-making and strengthens the value underpinning decisions made.
- 3 Information and values can be used to drive decisions, but support is important to help decision-makers feel comfortable with using them.

The findings from this study inform us of the main factors for supporting decisions of value and highlight the progress being made in these areas. Six important factors are highlighted, based on detailed exploration with staff across the NHS:

- stronger clinical and financial rapport
- greater patient involvement
- deeper values-based behaviour
- more information-driven decision-making
- increasingly supportive environments
- larger networks of peer support.

[See more information about this project](#) →

[See an infographic on our national survey on decisions](#) →

[See an academic literature review on decisions](#) →

# 1

## Stronger clinical and financial rapport

- Requirements for every NHS organisation to achieve savings means clinicians need to be actively involved in current and future decisions demanding much tougher trade-offs.
- Adjustments to balance clinical priorities with financial duties can be significant for clinicians moving into management.
- Good communication is essential and working well to achieve desired outcomes requires multi-disciplined working across clinical and financial teams.

***See findings on stronger clinical and financial rapport →***

# 2

## Greater patient involvement

- Quality is about patient experience as well as outcomes, and decisions made with an impact on quality will need to consider the views of patients to understand this.
- NHS organisations are getting better at including patient views in their decision-making but more can be done to recognise the value of greater patient involvement.
- Patient-reported feedback and complaints are invaluable ways of encouraging patients to get involved in changing and improving the care they receive.

***See findings on greater patient involvement →***

# 3

## Deeper values-based behaviour

- Values are important for defining how people should behave and in supporting decisions-making, particularly those based on instinct or experience.
- Most decision-making is based on experience, rather than instinct, but where instinct is used decision-makers feel less comfortable with how reliable it is.
- For values to be established as a core part of the NHS, communicating and upholding those values needs to be prioritised even when times get tough.

***See findings on deeper values-based behaviour →***

# 4

## More information-driven decision-making

- Data and information is playing a bigger role in decision-making at all levels but still holds greater influence at board level rather than on the front line.
- Encouraging staff to use information as intelligence allows greater confidence about decision-making with a view to driving improvements in care.
- Greater clarity is needed to inform staff of why data is collected and how it acts as a means to improving care rather than to single out particular teams or organisations.

***See findings on more information-driven decision-making →***



# 5

## Increasingly supportive environments

- Environments have a big impact on how decisions are made and the ability people have to consider quality and finance in decision-making.
- Most people feel they are making some or most of their decisions in a busy, distracting environment and while feeling stressed and physically tired.
- Some of these environmental factors are natural, but more needs to be done to improve staff health and wellbeing as part of a strategy to enhance decision-making.

*See findings on increasingly supportive environments →*

# 6

## Larger networks of peer support

- Peer support is a regular feature of the NHS and is often used to support decision-making, particularly among clinicians.
- Almost everyone finds the informal support of colleagues useful when making decisions and most believe it is essential for that support to offer a constructive challenge.
- There is a role for peer support as part of making decisions that balance quality and finance, but the balance of burden to benefit should carefully be considered.

*See findings on larger networks of peer support →*