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Dear Johanne

'Transgendered People: accessing health and social care services in North Tyneside'.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the LINK report on 'Transgendered People: accessing health and social care services in North Tyneside'.

I have set out our comments below.

General comments

We recognise the importance of ensuring that health services are accessible to all and are committed to valuing diversity and achieving equality. We also recognise the need for anonymity for the report.

The survey has been answered by a range of transgendered people nationally, rather than many local people and while this is a national service, it is therefore challenging for us to be able to apply the views of such a small number of people who have very different experiences to general experiences of services. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss individual problems with local service users where these have occurred and we are not already aware of them and would always wish to remind all service users of their rights to raise concerns or complaints if they are dissatisfied with the service they have received.

Since the report relates to healthcare and the experiences of people beyond those living across the area we cover, we have copied it to the North East Strategic Health Authority (SHA) and to NHS County Durham and Darlington (the organisation which commissions mental health services on behalf of other primary care trusts in the North East).

Training

We have made a commitment to valuing diversity and achieving equality as a member of the NHS North East Equality and Diversity Group. The group's vision is that NHS care in the North East will have a culture of fairness, equality, and respect for diversity that is evident to everyone. This includes raising awareness to embed positive attitudes and practices. Our Single Equality Scheme includes clear actions for continual improvement and development in the provision of training, making sure it has an appropriate equality focus for the various responsibilities and functions of staff.

The development of training to raise awareness of transgender issues with health staff is being led in the region by NHS Durham and Darlington on behalf of all the PCTs in the area. We will also work with North Tyneside Council to identify any areas where training and guidance can be used across health and social care.

Waiting lists

Across the region, we now have clear guidance around what should be included in the gender dysphoria package for service users – this follows a review of exceptional treatment policies to achieve greater consistency across the North East. The revised policies should be adopted in the North East on 1 August. These are based on national guidance and should streamline existing services, reducing waiting times experienced by service users that are mentioned in the report. Some elements of the service for transgendered people are commissioned regionally and led by NHS Durham and Darlington and as indicated above we will feed this report back to them for their information as the lead commissioners of those particular services.

It should be recognised that all services have been required to meet the 18 week target in recent years, although referrals may not be a GP to consultant one. (Even though the new government has announced that it will be removing this particular target, people still have a right under the NHS Constitution for treatment within 18 weeks of referral by a GP). However, it is an important factor that in the context of specific services for transgendered people, progress along the patient pathway is dependent upon whether each individual feels able to progress along to the next stage of the service and which part of the service they wish to access. For example, not everyone wishes to have surgery.

Improve social care response

This will be the responsibility of the local authority, although we work closely with North Tyneside Council to make sure that our services do dovetail with those provided by adult care services.

Regular consultation – trans-consultative group

We are not sure how successful a local group would be, given that the focus group outlined in the report had to be abandoned and don't feel that this could be used to triangulate the information gleaned in the national survey.

By its own admission the report is based on the views of a very small group of people experiencing the service and we recognise that this is difficult where people feel that it important that they keep their anonymity. NHS North of Tyne is part of the virtual engagement approach in North Tyneside and will work closely with North Tyneside Council with local communities and transgendered people have been involved in feeding into key parts of the North of Tyne strategic plan in the recent past. We would aim to continue this approach, and to include the group in any public engagement work we are carrying out where this will affect them.

We will work with our colleagues in the local authority as part of the wider plans to engage local communities in the borough on issues that affect transgender people. As stated above, where there are specific problems with services we would want to know about them. The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) and the complaints services within NHS organisations are able to address individual concerns in line with the NHS complaints regulations.

If you require any further information, please let me know.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely

Rachel Chapman
Director of Public Engagement and Communications