



CREATING CONSTRUCTIVE DISCOMFORT IN THE NHS

How the NHS Future Forum recommendations present opportunities to drive innovation in partnership working

The year has started with much controversy within the UK healthcare system. The Coalition Government is determined to drive the agenda for change and progress major reforms within the NHS. The debate on the detail rages on, although the Health and Social Care Bill has now been published and significant shifts in the way the NHS operates are underway.

The only certainty is that change will occur, although the exact composition of these changes is as yet unknown. While this is not the first time the pharmaceutical industry has had to adapt to significant shifts in the way the NHS operates, broad-reaching changes and economic pressures have led many to overhaul their business models completely.

At a time when key figures from across Government, the Department of Health and the NHS are asking the industry to bring innovation and a disruptive contribution to enable NHS reform, it is essential for pharma to gain insight on the future shape of the NHS.

Companies must proactively develop strategies that provide real value to those in the NHS who are currently dealing with the demands of delivering quality care at the lowest cost. Unfortunately, the views from individuals and different bodies within the NHS of what real value looks like are inconsistent, given the various different agendas at play.

With new stakeholders emerging as Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) and patients becoming empowered to inform the delivery of their care, the NHS Future Forum has been working with all stakeholders and provides a clear insight into the priorities for the NHS.

Careful consideration of its recommendations will provide pharma with a clear view of where, and how, real value can be provided through real working partnerships with the NHS to support patient-centred care.

The NHS Future Forum

Launched in April 2011, the NHS Future Forum is part of the Government's listening exercise on the current Health and Social Care Bill. Its 45 members have consulted widely with healthcare professionals, patients, CCG leads and healthcare providers. The Forum is independent of Government and was set up in order to 'pause, listen and reflect' on the content of the existing Bill.

Widely recognised as providing a valuable contribution to the development of Government policy, the Forum has so far published two sets of reports*. Its recommendations have been broadly accepted and many have passed into legislature informing the Health and Social Care Bill.

The Forum's recommendations

To make the most of the opportunities that may arise, pharma should take time to 'pause, listen and reflect' on the outputs of the Forum. For example, in its latest report to Government, the Forum focused on the central premise of NHS reforms; to deliver patient-centred care.

Most pharma companies have similarly supported the shift towards this approach and marketing campaigns have communicated the importance of patients and outcomes. However, within the NHS there is a great deal of frustration that patient-centred care has not been achieved despite the years of rhetoric.

Similarly, within the pharma sector there is growing recognition that rhetoric is not enough and some companies are attempting to deliver solutions to the NHS that truly put patients at the centre of care. These solutions are only effective where companies engage with patients and fulfil

on their commitments to support patients, and patient communities, in the pursuit of positive health outcomes. Therefore, a company deciding how to invest its budget in the sales and promotion of its brands needs a clear idea of what is required at each point in the value chain and how this translates to support for the NHS in delivering patient-centred care.

Improving outcomes will determine the value proposition, where resources are targeted and ultimately its success. Recommendations from the Forum focus specifically on the barriers to providing integrated care within the NHS and these can provide real insight into where companies should concentrate their efforts.

From recommendation to strategic initiative

The Forum makes a clear distinction that integration should occur around the patient, not the system. Pharma and the NHS have focused heavily on supporting emerging CCGs and the integration of their structures, organisations and pathways. However, the Forum states integration is about better outcomes for patients. It recommends that the entire health and social care system should embrace a definition of integration that truly puts people at the centre and that commissioning guidance should focus on 'supporting clinical commissioning groups to commission for people not specific diseases'.

While the investment by pharma in value added services to support the structural development of its NHS customers has no doubt provided some value, it is clear that many of these services have not directly helped significantly in delivering patient-centred care or improved outcomes.

Many of the initiatives are akin to traditional medical education programmes and are focused towards the HCP. To demonstrate truly a value proposition to the NHS, pharma's investment in value added solutions should follow the NHS focus and be directed at the patients themselves. Simply put, how do your programmes directly support the patient in the pursuit of positive health outcomes?

Pharma companies should focus on working in partnership with the NHS to design and deliver patient-centred programmes that improve patient care, interventions and outcomes across the patient journey. While this may raise questions about whether it is pharma's role to support such developments, doing so can benefit all stakeholders by delivering real change in patient care across NHS organisations, as well as significant returns and increased brand awareness for the pharma company.

Measure and improve

'You can only improve what you measure' is a familiar axiom. But with the introduction of partnership projects, how improvement is measured and demonstrated is still the subject of much debate.

The Future Forum *'urgently support the development of a new generation of patient-reported experience measures that evaluate patients' experiences across whole journeys of care, and within and between services'*. Therefore, a key consideration for companies engaging in partnership with the NHS is how a programme is measured to demonstrate improvement in patient care.

This is one area where pharma can provide real value to the NHS as it strives to improve how it uses information to enhance services. While the NHS focuses on breaking down barriers of information governance and territorial issues between providers of health to ensure information is available throughout the whole care journey, integrated

partnership programmes can help inform and develop how this information is gathered and shared to improve services.

Companies must be innovative in designing programmes that ensure patient experiences, interventions and outcomes across the whole patient journey are effectively measured, analysed and communicated. In essence, as pharma puts increasing effort into identifying patient needs for partnership programmes, equal focus should be given to the metrics used and how the outcomes can improve the quality of care and benefit the patient.

'Get on and do'

Pharma companies are innately innovative, particularly in the area of R&D. However, innovation in sales and marketing processes can be hindered by structural and procedural barriers. The Forum recognises that similar barriers within the NHS have hampered innovation and has recommended that CCGs 'should be allowed freedom and flexibility to develop local integrated solutions'.

The Government has stated that, where possible, barriers be removed and deregulation should occur where it improves the delivery of patient-centred care. Similarly, while opportunities and incentives now exist for pharma to actively engage in partnership with the NHS, its internal processes can either enable or prevent innovation.

The NHS and many industry personnel perceive a company's compliance policies as a block to innovation. They may also impact on the ability of employees to actively engage in supporting patient-centred care and discourage the NHS from engaging in partnership working with the industry.

To succeed within the evolving NHS market, companies need to ensure that while compliance is central and critical in all they do, it also fosters innovation and improves the pursuit of positive health outcomes.

A company's compliance policies need not be a hindrance to innovation; rather they should support the development of better understanding between the NHS and the company and enhance the core qualities required for joint working of honesty, transparency and reliability.

An opportunity for change

The NHS is seeking assistance from pharma to deliver patient-centred care and is looking for partnership relationships to drive the new NHS agenda. As Sir Ian Carruthers, Head of The Government Innovation Review Team for the NHS stated: "The pharma industry needs to think more in terms of working in partnership with the NHS rather than just sending in the sales force...the NHS needs your disruptive contribution to help NHS reform, but too few companies are coming forward".

With great change comes great opportunity - the recommendations from bodies such as the NHS Future Forum can assist in guiding the strategic direction of companies wishing to put patients at the centre of care.



Toby Gunner

Healthcare Business Unit
Director at Apodi Limited

email: toby.gunner@apodi.co.uk

* <http://bit.ly/IPuEuz>
<http://bit.ly/yblQgf>