

Integrated Community Equipment Service (ICES)

Multi Agency Board (MAB) report for Healthwatch

The Integrated Community Equipment Service (ICES) is a jointly funded service set up by Cumbria Council Adult social care and NHS Cumbria, now Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group. The service exists to order, distribute and recycle large and bespoke items of equipment for health and social care clients. Historically this service has supported both children's and adult equipment and is county wide. It is a Cumbria County Council led service. The Multi Agency Board (MAB) oversees the delivery of this service, makes recommendations for change to the services and informs the funding agencies of performance and pressures in the service.

A decade on from the governments directive to move towards care in the community, and six years since the implementation of Closer to Home, practitioners in Cumbria are still facing challenges – many unforeseen in those early days.

The ideology which supported such a radical move in the world of health care struck many as a sound and humane philosophy. But in practical terms the impact and the cost have been far greater and more far reaching than anyone could have envisaged.

Some of those challenges include:

- Reduction in hospital beds in Cumbria across all services, with guidelines for care in care homes being altered leading to more infirm patients being nursed in care homes than previously acceptable, albeit with district nurse input and regular visits from the Care Quality Commission.
- patients discharged earlier than usual both post-operatively and following illness, and therefore needing more nursing input – potentially 24/7 for some patients – and more specialist equipment needed in the home.
- more end of life patients now expressing the wish to be cared for and end their lives at home. The ICES board have pledged transfer of care to the home within 24 hours of this choice being made, whereas other patients with chronic illnesses may have to wait longer for this service.

- this increased need for more equipment out in the community provides logistic challenges from delivery and removal of equipment, to keeping vehicles roadworthy and meeting infection control standards. The rural nature of our county provides its own challenges. Three depots (Maryport, Ulverston and Kendal) store and provide a host of varied equipment for the use of multidisciplinary teams county-wide. In practical terms this means the fleet of six vans and teams of drivers being on the road almost constantly. Computer and IT support to monitor the movement and use of equipment is no easy task.

- providing nursing care 24/7 has already been mentioned, but nurses on the ground, implementing closer to home report the need for increased nursing staff numbers of all grades as well as multidisciplinary support to provide care to the standard needed and expected. Unexpected crises which need to be dealt with at the time, nurses trying to be responsive to patients needs often have knock-on effects for the rest of the day, mainly appointment times not being met due to even short delays. This potentially leads to dissatisfaction among clients of Closer to Home and diminished confidence in the service.

- the extra costs, many of which were unforeseen at the outset, affect not only the NHS, Cumbria County Council Adult Social Care but the clients of Closer to Home themselves depending on their financial circumstances.

The ICES Board has always been dedicated and worked hard and thoroughly to get ICES MAB up and running. But now it is up to central government to address some of the issues identified in the implementation of Closer to Home in Cumbria, mainly addressing costs for increased staffing, equipment, training for optimum skill mix etc. It is also necessary to invest in the infrastructure upon which Closer to Home depends, such as working towards making the depots fit for purpose to ensure seamless running of this care in the community.

All members of the ICES MAB Board are budget-holders and are constrained by their organisations budgetary controls.

Ellen Cullen – Ambassador for Royal College of Nursing and continuing in role undertaken for LINK, now reporting to Healthwatch.