



The state of health care and adult social care in England

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Purpose of Briefing

This briefing summarises the main points of Care Quality Commission's (CQC) assessment of the state of care in England in 2020/21 report published in October 2021.

It is intended to help everyone within National Care Group (NCG) to reflect upon the conclusions made specifically in respect of the services that the organisation provides.

The full document, a summary and an easy read version of the report is available at https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20211021_stateofcare2021_print.pdf

Summary of Report

The report acknowledges that whilst the social care system responded well to the pandemic the impact on many using services has in some cases been significant.

Specifically, the report points out the significant impact of the pandemic on the lives of people with a learning disability and those with mental health issues. CQC suggests that inspections of services supporting these individuals to identify areas of poor practice that needs to be addressed.

The report acknowledges and welcomes the commitment from government to invest more into the social care system and suggests that this should be used to encourage new ways of working.

The report also identifies the recruitment difficulties faced by the whole sector and suggests that investment must be made in developing effective career pathways for social care staff.

People's Experience of Care

Key points for the individuals we support include:

- The impact of the pandemic on many who use health and social care services has been intensely damaging.
- The pandemic has led to a continuation of inequalities for some trying to access support.
- People with a learning disability have faced increased challenges as a result of the pandemic.
- The need for mental health care has increased, with children and young people particularly badly affected.
- Colleagues working across the sector have worked hard and have been under enormous pressure. This needs to be considered and addressed.
- The reputation of the sector is extremely high.

Increased challenges for people with a learning disability.

The report highlights that between January 2020 and 20 November 2020, the risk of death involving COVID-19 for people with a learning disability was greater for both men and women even when adjusting for a range of personal and household characteristics.

In addition, the report found that the physical healthcare needs of people, including how COVID-19 may present in people with a learning disability, were not always taken in account by systems. Furthermore, people faced difficulties in accessing services – including day services, education placements, respite care and health services (GPs, dental, mental health).

This caused people distress and, in some cases, led to a deterioration in people's health. It also led to some people expressing their distress in ways that affected others living with them.

Responding to the Challenges

In response to the challenges identified CQC sets out a number of proposed actions:

- Providers such as National Care Group, should be clear they understand the impact the pandemic has had on the individuals it supports.
- CQC will review the way it regulates services for people with a learning disability and autistic people.
- CQC will place more emphasis on assessing the *culture of services*

The Importance of Culture

Responding to the impact of the pandemic the report sets out what CQC considers elements of a good culture:

- recruiting people with a strong value base that respects and values the needs of those being supported
- supported individuals are interacted with and given opportunities to develop skills and a meaningful life rather than just observed and followed
- plans should support moving people onto more independent living when appropriate
- those admitted to services during the pandemic should be reviewed to ensure that they have settled in well
- opportunities for greater stakeholder engagement are actively encouraged
- systems are in place to check quality is delivered around the clock.

Rising demand for mental health care

The report acknowledges the fact that the pandemic has impacted on the mental health of many and as such demand for services has risen.

Of concern was the risk that those needing access to services and support sometimes found this difficult. In some cases where people are eventually able to access services their mental health conditions were severe. This was creating major issues for acute and community mental health services.

Workforce Wellbeing

The report acknowledges people across all professions, and carers and volunteers, have worked tirelessly to help those who needed care. The impact of working under this sustained pressure cannot be underestimated.

Providers such as National Care Group have focussed on this issue and sought to provide a range of health and wellbeing initiatives for colleagues to access.

These can be accessed via the MyHealthAdvantage app which is National Care Groups' employee assistance portal. Support is provided to aid colleagues' mental, physical, emotional and financial wellbeing. They also have 24/7 access to a confidential telephone counselling service. Additional wellbeing initiatives have been launched including a monthly Wellbeing Wednesday bulletin and development of the MenoHub and Menopause Advocate. National Care Group remains committed to raising awareness and removing stigma surrounding mental health issues by continuing to train Mental Health First Aiders across the Group.

The Role of Adult Social Care

The report clearly acknowledges that the pandemic has reinforced how vital adult social care is for the many people who rely on it. Services have faced massive challenges in keeping people safe during the pandemic, while supporting them to live fulfilling lives through person-centred care.

CQC was pleased to report that most care providers that they have inspected have demonstrated that they have faced their challenges well. They have been supported by staff who have showed resilience under unprecedented pressures. They have gone the extra mile to keep the people in their care healthy, active, and as independent as possible, while keeping family members and carers informed and engaged.

That said, CQC notes that the sector is fragile and needs continued support.

Quality Concerns

CQC point out a number of ongoing quality concerns and risks about services:

- The inappropriate use of restrictive practices
- Issues with staffing and management – poor leadership leading to closed culture
- Lack of external oversight – arising from restrictions imposed during the pandemic
- The continued reduction in Deprivation of Liberty (DoLS) reporting than in previous years

Looking Ahead

CQC believes that there are many lessons from the pandemic upon which to build upon going forward.

Investment in the sector is seen as important as to is the need to create a clearly defined career pathway for social care staff. In addition, CQC urges all stakeholders to continue to work collaboratively to find local solutions to the challenges faced.

National Care Group response to the report

National Care Group has been saddened by the higher rates of mortality reported nationally for people with a learning disability arising from the pandemic.

As the pandemic continues to become part of everyday life, National Care Group will continue to work collaboratively with the individuals it supports their families and statutory agencies to deliver the best outcomes it can. This must include making sure that the individuals we support access all of the services they need including routine health and other checks.

In addition, National Care Group will continue to engage with and support all colleagues who have worked so hard.

The challenges on the sector identified within the report are acknowledged as to is the pressure this places on all.

The resilience and determination of all colleagues across National Care Group has continued to enable services to keep individuals we support safe and well. There will continue to be clear leadership, governance, and support to all services thorough the pandemic.

Where quality within services fails to achieve the high standards expected, National Care Group will quickly take action to improve standards. The quality concerns identified within the report are noted and will be focussed on within services.

National Care Group is committed to investing in innovation including technology and welcomes feedback from all staff where they think this can be improved.

Finally, National Care Group looks forward to working with all organisations to improve the quality and range of services available to individuals with a learning disability, mental health issues or acquired brain injury.

Learning points



Take some time within your next team meeting to think about the role your service plays locally in improving the lives of the individuals you support – can you evidence all the good work?



Are you sure you understand Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) requirement? Does this need to be reviewed in light of Covid for the individuals you support?



Do you understand what the term “closed culture” means? How would you describe the culture in the service within which you work?



In light of the pandemic are you clear about the impact this may be having on the individuals you support and your colleagues? Does anything need to change?



What did the last inspection report about the service within I work say? Could anything be improved?



Do you think the quality concerns identified by CQC can be seen in your service? If so what needs to change.



What to do next?

This #QualityMatters should be discussed in team meetings, supervisions and placed in the Best Practice and Innovations File.