

## **All Party Parliamentary Group on Patient Safety**

### **Patient Safety: Key Issues and Future Challenges - 5 December 2007**

#### **Overview:**

The focus of this meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Patient Safety was the key patient safety challenges facing the Department of Health and the wider healthcare community in 2008 and beyond. In particular there was discussion around Hospital Acquired Infections and the measures being taken to reduce the risk of them.

#### **Speakers:**

- Ann Keen MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, The Department of Health
- Professor Sir Ian Kennedy, Chair, The Healthcare Commission

#### **Welcome:**

Dr Howard Storate MP, Chair of the group, welcomed all attendees to the meeting and opened with a brief introduction of both speakers. Dr Storate MP stated that he hoped the meeting would provide an opportunity to explore some of the key issues around patient safety and invited attendees to ask questions at the end.

#### **Ann Keen MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State:**

Ann Keen MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, started by emphasising her own personal reasons for promoting the importance of patient safety. As a former nurse she was particularly concerned that safety risks to patients still remain high. She stated that patient safety was, and still should be presumed to be part of the job for hospital staff and should never be considered a separate issue.

The Minister asserted the government's commitment to patient safety, stating it is 'middle of the brief' for the government. She declared that patient safety is the 'social heart' of the Department of Health and outlined a number of proposed government initiatives, in particular automatic identification. The government is keen to promote bar-coding, as it is their belief that it can reduce risks and errors whilst improving efficiency and cutting costs. The Minister gave the example of Heartlands Hospital in Birmingham where a tagging system has meant that one extra patient can be safely treated a day.

The Minister complimented the increasing work being done by the Healthcare Commission, NICE and NPSA around patient safety. Mentioning the Darzi review, she stated how this has aided placing quality and safety right at the forefront of minds. Highlighting the various initiatives introduced by the Department of Health such as the NHS Hygiene 2007, she re-iterated the importance that doctors and all hospital staff are encouraged to implement these measures.

In closing, Ann Keen MP mentioned the valuable role being played by SHAs in patient safety issues and how the importance of patient safety should be embedded in every hospital. She welcomed the attendees to begin the discussion with the government as a route of getting to these 'real issues'.

### **Professor Sir Ian Kennedy, Chair, the Healthcare Commission:**

Professor Sir Ian Kennedy, Chair, the Healthcare Commission followed on from Ann Keen MP by outlining what he referred to as a "gloomy history" to patient safety. The 2006 National Audit Office Report 'A Safer Place for Patients', he called sanguine and depressing reading. Hospitals have become too concerned with the development of targets, at the expense of patient safety. Agreeing with Ann Keen, he stated that patient safety should be at the forefront of patient care.

The Healthcare Commission have proposed and acted on several measures to bring about change. Together with Lord Patel, the Chairman of the Healthcare Commission launched a charter as a commitment to safety. Bodies including the Royal College of Nurses and the Royal College of Midwives have signed, and by so agreeing to allow the Healthcare Commission to verify that patient safety is continuing to be priority.

Professor Kennedy highlighted how the Corporate Plan 2007/8 outlines the stance of the Healthcare Commission, stating 'Safety of Patient is paramount to us and runs through all our work.' Professor Kennedy then gave examples of measures being taken by the Healthcare Commission to ensure patient safety is being implemented in Trusts: surveys of patients and staff are to be carried out on their opinions of care; assessment of the NHS's success on meeting targets and in particular its adherence to the government's 'Hygiene Code' is also to be completed; and the independent sector will be assessed, and all data published with the intention of monitoring patient safety.

It was also noted by Professor Kennedy, that Hospital Acquired Infections are not the only risks which patients face. Patients should be aware of thrombosis, errors in management, errors of medicinal management and stated that falls are the biggest problem in hospitals today.

In conclusion, the Chairman of the Healthcare Commission complimented the hard work of the NHS, stating that they treat 1 million people every 36 hours. Professor Kennedy then proposed a challenge for Parliament. In the light of the forthcoming Bill, he asked, "How are we going to maintain the vigour and rigour on patient safety?"

### **Conclusion:**

Dr. Stoaite thanked both speakers and invited attendees to ask any questions they might have. The panel answered on a variety of subjects, including doctor training, the causes of high risks in patient safety, and the comparison between the independent sector and the NHS. Throughout, both Ann Keen MP and Professor Sir Ian Kennedy consistently supported all measures being taken to ensure that patient safety becomes an integral part of everyone's 'professional DNA'.