

Guidance on the Assessment of Core Standards

Guidance for overview and scrutiny committees and patient and public involvement forums

The Healthcare Commission has created an entirely new approach to assessing and reporting on the performance of NHS trusts. Our annual health check replaces star ratings from this year and requires NHS trusts to produce yearly self-assessments. For more information see our publications *Assessment for improvement: the annual health check* and *Criteria for assessing core standards*. There will be a summary of the annual health check available on request.

As part of the annual health check, we will measure performance by reference to the 24 core standards identified by the Government (see *National standards, local action*, Department of Health 2004).

These cover seven key areas: safety, clinical and cost effectiveness, governance, patient focus, accessible and responsive care, care environment and amenities, and public health.

In the first year, a draft self-assessment (or declaration) will be produced by trusts in October, before the final version is submitted into the Healthcare Commission in April 2006. We will cross check information provided by trusts, and in some cases inspections and random spot checks will be made.

We would like local authorities' overview and scrutiny committees and trusts' patient and public involvement forums to help with this process. The experiences of your organisation will provide important feedback about views from patients or others in the local community. We expect trusts to ask you for your views. This guidance is to help you understand this process and to clarify how you can get involved.

We expect this process to develop over time and as such we are working with the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health and the Centre for Public Scrutiny to look at ways to coordinate activities and share best practice. We will also be working directly with overview and scrutiny committees and patient and public involvement forums, testing the current process and developing it for future years.

General

- We encourage all trusts to seek views from overview and scrutiny committees and patient and public involvement forums at an early stage. When the trust asks you for comments, it may also wish to share the contents of its proposed declaration with you, in order to help develop a more rounded declaration.
- Overview and scrutiny committees and patient and public involvement forums may wish to consider how their activities and regular work planning can, in future years, contribute to the annual health check. It is not our intention to create any additional work burden for your organisation but instead tap into existing activities and encourage better joint planning across organizations.

Declaration

All trusts will be required to ask overview and scrutiny committees and patient and public involvement forums to comment on the trust's performance against core standards. Whilst your organisation is under no compulsion to provide comment, your thoughts on issues that you have scrutinised or monitored will provide us with important and useful feedback from the community or the experiences and perspectives of patients, which will help demonstrate whether trusts are meeting the standards.

Some trusts have more than one overview and scrutiny committee in its catchment area. In those cases it will contact every relevant overview and scrutiny committee, based on the distribution of the population that uses its services. Your organisation may also request that a trust invites comments from you. If you do this, the trust will contact you along with its other local partners. In some locations, overview and scrutiny committees have joint working arrangements, where this is the case the trust may wish to use those arrangements in gaining your comments.

Members of the overview and scrutiny committees and patient and public involvement forums are not expected to have in depth, expert knowledge about all the services that a trust is providing and is being assessed on. The aim of your involvement is to provide a 'reality check' on the assessment and to demonstrate the links between services and the experience of local people.

Your organisation is welcome to comment on any aspect of the performance of a trust against any of the core standards. We have provided some additional guidance for you which lists a number of standards that we would particularly welcome comments on along with some questions which trusts will ask you to consider when making your comment.

You may wish to, but are not obliged to, limit comments to those areas where your organisation has undertaken reviews or monitored services, or where there has been substantial discussion between the trust and your organisation. This is entirely acceptable, as we do not want to generate additional work for your organisation.

Where there is a good working relationship between the overview and scrutiny committee and patient and public involvement forum, or where there has been joint work or work focusing on the same issues, it may be helpful for both organizations to discuss their draft responses to the declaration together before submitting them.

Where your organisation makes specific comments about an aspect of the performance of the trust, you should be able to support this with reference to your work. However, your organisation will not be required to provide any supplementary evidence with the comments you make to the trust.

If an overview and scrutiny committee or a patient and public involvement forum considers that it is unable to make any comments on the declaration, this will be accepted and neither the trust nor your organisation will be criticised for this.

The trust is required to incorporate any comment your organisation makes unedited in their submission to us.

Trust boards are required to include their declaration in the public part of a board meeting before they submit the declaration in April. The declaration should then be published.

Cross checking

The Healthcare Commission will check the declaration by looking at a number of things relating to the trust including:

- comments made by overview and scrutiny committees and patient and public involvement forums
- routine information about how well it performs, derived from data sets that have national coverage

- complaints made about the organisation
- Healthcare Commission's surveys of patients and staff
- Healthcare Commission's own activities such as investigations
- information obtained from other regulators and review agencies

We do not expect to contact overview and scrutiny committees and patient and public involvement forums during this stage, although we may do so to clarify a comment if necessary.

Selective inspection

If the Healthcare Commission identifies that there is a risk of not meeting a standard, highlighted by the cross checking process, it will be discussed with the trust and we may visit them as part of the selective inspections. The discussions may include overview and scrutiny committees and patient and public involvement forums, particularly if they have made comments on the specific standard.

Your point of contact with the Healthcare Commission will be your local area team or the regional office. Where we contact your organisation, this will be done through our local staff so that comments are better informed by local knowledge and an understanding of local partners.

Reporting

Finally, the Healthcare Commission will decide how well the trust is doing and award it a performance rating taking into consideration the declaration, the cross checking and any inspections that have taken place. A final report will be issued in October.

Draft declaration

For 2005/2006, there will be a draft declaration to help organisations improve services and decide on priorities and implement plans to achieve any progress necessary to meet any standards prior to April 2006. The process for overview and scrutiny committees and patient and public involvement forums will be the same as with the final declaration.

Patient and public involvement forums and overview and scrutiny committee questions

The comments of local authorities' overview and scrutiny committees and patient and public involvement forums will greatly add to the Healthcare Commission's understanding of the views of patients and the public on the quality of care they receive. In order to assist your organisation in providing us with your comments there are some key points that may be useful to consider:

- we are interested in all your organisation's comments and, therefore, you should consider areas of good practice as well as any areas for improvement
- trusts are being asked to comment on their performance against the 24 core standards published in National standards, local action (Department of Health 2004). However, trusts will not need to comment on certain standards:
 - C7d, C7f and C19. These relate to financial management, existing performance requirements and access to services with nationally agreed timescales. We intend to assess performance against these standards separately for all trusts
 - C15, regarding provision of food for patients, is not relevant to ambulance trusts and should not be included on their declaration. However, as commissioners of services, we would expect this to apply to all PCTs
- you may wish to comment on specific parts of the standards or on an element of a standard that we have outlined in our document Criteria for assessing core standards. If you do, please note the element or part of the standard along with your comments
- we are asking trusts to declare their performance against the core standards for the period April 1st to March 31st
- your organisation may have undertaken work that comments directly or indirectly on the performance of the trust against the core standards and you may wish to use this to support any comments you might make
- while your views are valuable to us there is no obligation on your organisation to comment on the performance of the trust against any or all of the standards

You may comment on any aspect of the performance of the trust against the core standards and in doing so you might find it useful to consider the following questions:

1) Is there any aspect of the trust's performance against core standards that your organisation wishes to make known to the Healthcare Commission?

2) There are a number of standards that may be directly relevant to the work of your organisation. These include:

- standard C17, which relates to the involvement of patients and public in designing, planning, delivering and improving services
- standards C13 to C16, which include the treatment of patients with dignity and respect, providing access for patients to suitable information about the services they receive and the trust's complaints process, and the choice, availability and suitability of food
- standards C22 to C24, which outline issues of public health

Does your organisation wish to comment specifically on the trust's performance against these standards?