

Your part in the annual health check 2007/2008

A step-by-step guide for patient and public involvement forums, overview and scrutiny committees and foundation trusts' boards of governors





From April 2008, trusts will again be gearing up for the declaration part of the annual health check. We need your comments to make sure that we get the full picture about their performance in 2007/2008.

The Healthcare Commission keeps a check on local healthcare organisations and provides information that is of interest to patients and the public about their local health services – safety and cleanliness, dignity and respect, standards of care, keeping people healthy, waiting to be seen, and good management.

By checking trusts' performance and providing information, we aim to help trusts to improve their services.

We want you to tell us how you think your local trust is performing against the standards set by Government, and to give us the views and experiences of people in your community. We are determined to put the interests of patients and the public at the heart of our work, so your feedback is very important to us. Trusts must include your comments – word for word – in the declarations they submit to us. But if you are invited to comment and say no, neither you nor the trust will be penalised.

We invited patient and public involvement forums, overview and scrutiny committees and foundation trusts' boards of governors to comment last year and they responded

well. We really appreciate the hard work that went into providing commentaries that produced so much useful intelligence.

1. Getting ready

Every trust must submit a declaration to us by midday on 30 April 2008. As part of this process, trusts are responsible for inviting 'third parties' to comment on their performance. Third parties include patient and public involvement forums, overview and scrutiny committees and foundation trusts' board of governors.

Your local trust should contact you in early 2008 to agree a timetable for including your comments in their declaration. You may also want to start discussing what you might say, so you are prepared.

If you agree to comment, you may want to set up regular meetings with your members as soon as possible, so that you have enough time to seek the views of others in your community. You may also want to contact the other third parties in your area, so that you can discuss your respective roles, exchange views about local trusts and coordinate your efforts.

You may find it useful to share your draft comments with your trust or with a regional assessment manager from the Healthcare Commission. You don't have to take their feedback into account, but working together may benefit everyone involved.



2. What's new in 2007/2008

The Government published *Standards for Better Health* in July 2004, which set out 24 core standards. These core standards describe a minimum level of service, which patients have the right to expect. We are again asking trusts to tell us how they have performed against the core standards this year. You can comment on your trust's performance in relation to any of these standards. You do not have to comment on all of them.

If you provided comments to your trust for the annual health check in 2006/2007, you may remember that we also asked some of you to comment on their performance in relation to developmental standards. This was a pilot assessment for trusts and we are not asking them to report their progress in relation to these standards again this year. You therefore will not be asked to submit comments in relation to the developmental standards this year.

You are not expected to sign off or comment directly on the declaration by your local trust. Your comments should relate to the period from 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008.

Given that patient and public involvement forums are in a period of transition, they may wish to submit their comments to trusts at an earlier stage this year. In the key dates section below, we have set out some suggestions to enable this.

3. How will your comments make a difference?

Your comments, once submitted to the Healthcare Commission, will be made publicly available. You could make a difference to your local health services just by putting your views on record.

Your comments will be taken into account when we make our final assessments of how trusts have performed in 2007/2008.

They are more likely to influence our assessments if they are supported by facts.

4. Submitting your comments

There is no standard template for giving your comments to trusts – use a format that works best for you. Consider allowing the chair of your group to 'sign off' your comments. This could help you to finalise them more quickly.

It is important that trusts have enough time to include your comments in their declarations before the deadline. They must send us their declaration no later than midday on 30 April 2008 and we will check that they have included your comments.

They should also send you a copy of their declaration once they have submitted it to us so that you can check your comments.

They do not have to share the content of their declaration with you before it is submitted.



Tips to help ensure your comments make a difference

- Think about what matters most to you and the people in your community – what are the most important points you want to get across?
- Think about examples of good practice as well as problems and areas for improvement
- Familiarise yourself with the 24 core standards and guidance relating to them. Aim to match the standards with the points you want to make
- Try to find facts and examples to back up your comments. These may include notes of a meeting or visit to a trust, the results of a local survey, or personal stories from individuals with supporting dates and documents
- Do not submit the supporting information with your comments, but be prepared in case we need to clarify some aspect of your comment



5. Cross checking and follow up

Your comments will be one of the many sources of information that will be used to check the trust's declaration. This helps to ensure our assessments are as fair and accurate as possible. We will also carry out follow up inspections with approximately 20% of trusts – some of these trusts will be chosen at random and some will have been identified as being most at risk of not meeting the core standards.

If your local trust gets a follow up inspection, you may be contacted by one of our regional assessment managers to discuss your comments. We will want to see your supporting information at this point.



Key dates

- **Early 2008**

Establish the deadlines for submitting comments to your trust

Because we recognise that patient and public involvement forums are in a state of transition during this period, we accept they may need to submit their commentaries early, and therefore that their commentaries may cover less than twelve months. Forums may negotiate with their trusts to submit their commentaries any time, which we suggest may be from 1 January 2008. They will need to make clear in their commentary the period of time it covers

If you do not wish to submit any comments for the 2007/2008 annual health check, it would be helpful if you could write formally to your trust advising them of this

- **21 April 2008**

Trusts can begin to submit their declaration to us

- **Midday 30 April 2008**

Deadline for trusts to submit their declaration to us

- **16 May 2008**

Trust declarations made public

- **October 2008**

Results of the annual health check published

Learning from last year's annual health check

When writing your commentaries for this year's annual health check, try to plan and word your comments so that they include

'items of intelligence' (by that we mean pieces of information) that can be extracted from the commentary and 'coded' against one or more standard, for a particular trust.

In 2007, we received 1,469 comments from third parties. From these comments, 8,196 items of intelligence were extracted and coded because they related to one or more of the standards. Each coded item was weighted 'high', 'medium' or 'low':

- 'high' meant the item had strong association with a particular standard, was closely aligned to the criteria in our inspection guides and provided clear information to support the opinions expressed
- 'low' meant the item related to a small aspect of a standard, or was about one department rather than a whole trust, or had little back-up information
- in total, 492 (6%) of the items were weighted as 'high', 4,180 (51%) as 'low' and 3,524 (43%) as 'medium' weighting.

Find out more

The following publication offers further information about the annual health check:

The annual health check in 2007/2008: assessing and rating the NHS

This can be downloaded directly from the Healthcare Commission website at www.healthcarecommission.org.uk

We will shortly be publishing sets of criteria for NHS trusts to give them more information about the assessment of core standards for this year's annual health check. These will also be available to download from the Commission website once they are published.



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