

## National Wheelchair Managers Forum Chairman's report 2010-2011

The past 12 months have delivered to the country the most extreme fiscal measures probably since the formation of this Forum. The Public Sector, understandably, is in the forefront of the onslaught and the financial pressures on the NHS are unprecedented. Wheelchair Services, as with most other NHS services, are experiencing their share of the pain in various ways dependent upon the local circumstances both political and financial.

As often happens with Wheelchair Services, there is not a nationwide consistent approach. Some services have had staff posts wiped out, budgets slashed, eligibility criteria raised to reduce demand, or waiting lists increased by slowing supply. The 18 week Referral to Treatment standard, which was so fundamental this time last year, is in many cases a standard of the past. The benefits of, and the need for, a National approach to service levels and standards has never been more obviously demonstrated.

### Service Development

There has been some excellent national work done this year by the DH National Wheelchair Services Advisory Group, (NWSAG) both centrally and at its pilot sites in the East of England and the West Country. As I write this report I have no idea if the funding pressures have arrested this project in its infancy at the end of the financial year, or whether it will be funded to deliver some effective changes across England.

We have to hope that:

- National Wheelchair Services Advisory Group (NWSAG) does not follow its predecessor the
- Transforming Community Equipment & Wheelchair Services (TCEWS) or its predecessor the
- Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP) – 'Out & About', or its predecessor
- Integrating Community Equipment Services (ICES), which jettisoned wheelchair services, or its predecessor the
- Modernisation Agency Wheelchair Collaborative. – which actually did achieve some real change on a medium scale.

### Moving towards 'Any Willing Provider'

This last 12 months has also seen the beginning of the effects on Wheelchair Services, of PCT and Provider separation, nationwide. There has been an increasing trend for Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) commissioners to tender the service in an attempt to find the best Provider across all sectors. This trend is an open and transparent way to widen procurement and secure a modern, high quality and cost effective service that also meets with current policy requirements. Although early indications look good, it is too early to judge the wide scale success of the outcome and whether the benefits have followed through to the service users. The principle of open competition across the Public, Private and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sectors should sharpen all providers. The 'new' Providers span the range of Charities, Social Enterprises, Community Interest

Companies, Private companies and Public Bodies like NHS and Social Care. The greater fragmentation of Providers must increase the challenge of achieving national scale equity of service, unless, of course, the Commissioners of the Wheelchair Services close ranks and begin to require the same standards, outputs and KPIs. Etc.

It is exactly this group, the Commissioners, that the DH NWSAG are trying to involve and this might be the only way to move towards a more equitable national service. Even more challenges lie ahead because the current Commissioners are transforming in to GP led commissioning consortiums – but that has now been put on slo-mo by the current coalition government. In all of this structural change and financial pressures, it is our role to be the guardians of quality and timely service provision for our clients.

#### Forum achievements

Many members of the NWMF have been involved in all the above initiatives and I would like to thank everyone who represents our Forum at all levels. Much of our work is unseen. It involves gentle influencing and being an effective agent for logical change. Thank you everyone.

This year we managed, with our partners, to get the National Wheelchair Standards document revised and published. We all know it is used widely by commissioners across England and is valued because it has input from our service users. Many thanks to you all for your group work and tireless feedback.

We've achieved our target to update our website for April 1<sup>st</sup> go-live date. I am really pleased with the new website and am sure it has greater potential to be a platform for debate, information and reference in future years for service users, ourselves and anyone interested in the provision of wheelchairs. The responsibility to keep it current, relevant and up to date resides with all of us. Many thanks to Ben Lumley our previous webmaster and to Ian Sherwood our current webmaster for their skills and support in this. Visit it:

[www.wheelchairmanagers.org.uk](http://www.wheelchairmanagers.org.uk)

Finally, my grateful thanks to the team that support me: Alex Winterbone our secretary, Jan Smith our Treasurer and Krystn Jarvis our Vice-Chair. You know how much I lean on you at times. Due to my current workload, this is probably the year I will step down from being your chairperson. I have learned so much, visited some super services and places, met so many great people, been supported by so many and enjoyed every minute. Hopefully I've played a small part with NWMF in developing and improving services for clients. It has been a privilege.

Peter Gage.  
Chair. NWMF.  
12/04/2011