Extending patient choice (Any qualified provider)

Introduction
We want to talk to local people about enabling patients who are referred for a service to choose from a range of qualified providers and select the one that they feel best meets their needs.

The Government made a commitment under the NHS reforms to extend the choices people have over their healthcare, as part of its vision of patients and the public being at the heart of the NHS. By extending the choice of provider they expect to drive up quality, empower patients and enable innovation. Extending choice of any qualified provider (AQP) is a way to improve access, address gaps and inequalities and improve quality of services where patients have identified variable quality in the past.

What is meant by extending choice of provider?
When patients are referred for a particular service they can choose, where appropriate, from a range of qualified providers and select the one that best meets their needs.

For example, most forms of hearing loss do not involve illness or disease so do not need to be treated in hospital. Given a wider choice, many people with hearing problems may prefer to visit a provider located in the high street or a mobile clinic instead, because it is more convenient and doesn't make them feel they are 'ill'.

Increasingly, we expect that patients will seek information about the quality of care when choosing which provider to select. Extending their choice of provider will enable patients to access better quality services offered by a wider range of providers.

What is ‘Any qualified provider’?
Any provider of NHS services will need to be qualified and registered to deliver a range of specified services within a community setting. This means they will have to meet certain standards for the quality of the care they offer. This will not be based on price – a single price for services will be paid to all qualified providers of that service.

Engagement activity
Nationally eight community and mental health services have been selected and each area has to identify three of these for change to be in place by September 2012. Other services which are of higher local priority may be chosen, if there is a clear case based on the views of service users and potential gains in quality and access.

Based on what services patients have said might benefit from extended choice of provider, these eight services are:
- Musculoskeletal services for back and neck pain
- Adult hearing services in the community
- Continence services (adults and children)
- Direct access diagnostic tests
- Podiatry services
- Wheelchair services (children)
- Leg ulcer and wound healing
- Primary care psychological therapies (adults) ('talking therapies')

Locally we have identified the following services as priorities:

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<th>Buckinghamshire</th>
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Why have we chosen these services?
We have chosen these services because there is real potential to improve local access, these pathways are relatively simple, and our current contract commitments mean that change can be achieved within the timescales set by the government.

How can you get involved?
We want to find out your views on which of these service areas you think might benefit most from offering an extended choice of provider and are asking whether you think the proposed services will meet the demands of patients and deliver improvements in quality. More information about the services can be found in the handout “Extending patient choice – the services being considered”.

Feedback from this engagement will help us to confirm which local community and/or mental health services would benefit from offering an extended choice of provider. We are also asking you to let us know if you have other areas of NHS services you think would benefit from this approach.

Time scales
We will start to implement AQP for the selected services from April 2012 and this should be completed by September 2012.

Have your say
We would like to hear the views of local people and organisations about these changes. To give your views or for more information:

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For Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire residents to comment on line visit [http://bit.ly/extendingchoice](http://bit.ly/extendingchoice). You will be asked to register before you can get all the information.