The Government’s strategy for reforming urgent and emergency care services has recognised the need for services to work together

*Healthcare Commission. Not just a matter of time. September 2008*

Achievement of the policy initiatives around emergency and urgent care requires a system approach. One way of delivering a system is by using Emergency and Urgent Care Networks (EUCNs) to organise, co-ordinate and manage the necessary processes. The Medical Care Research Unit at the University of Sheffield has carried out two pieces of research for DH to identify the important issues around EUCN development and to assess current EUCN activity in England.


The key issues identified were:

- Size of network is important and regional system requirements has to be balanced with the need to deliver relevant and appropriate local services.
- Membership of boards should reflect network strategic aims and objectives.
- Networks have the potential to reduce inefficiencies, deliver innovative services, improve quality of care and give value for money.
- Success in achieving objectives and functions is dependent on:
  - Senior level (Chief Executive) participation and commitment.
  - A framework of work streams and specialist groups to allow projects and initiatives to be taken forward.
  - Engagement of a range of emergency and urgent care providers and commissioners.
  - Dedicated network support – a network manager and some administrative resource with adequate funding to support and manage network functions.

Our survey of EUCNs has shown that Emergency and Urgent care network activity is continuing and developing into stronger organisational structures. The networks who responded clearly viewed their role and function as being the “vehicle” for implementing emergency and urgent care policy initiatives and for improving emergency and urgent care across the health economies they represent. Although the reorganisation of PCTs and Ambulance Services in 2006 presented problems it also provided a catalyst for the growth of established networks and creation of new ones who have developed comprehensive and ambitious plans for whole system review and change.

*The full report of this work will be published by DH in due course.*

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