Written Question

Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to support effective commissioning for ovarian cancer.

Paul Burstow (Minister of State (Care Services), Health)

The White Paper 'Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS' describes the Government's vision to create a more autonomous and accountable national health service. Within this new commissioning architecture, responsibility for most commissioning is devolved to local general practitioner (GP) commissioning consortia, supported and held to account by an independent NHS Commissioning Board.

'Improving Outcomes: A Strategy for Cancer', published on 12 January, discusses how commissioners can be supported to commission cancer services, including ovarian cancer services, in the reformed NHS. A significant amount of cancer care is best commissioned for populations covering one and a half to two million and, where population size requirements mean that a single GP consortium is too small to commission a particular service, then GP consortia will wish to work collaboratively. GP consortia will be able to decide whether they wish to identify a lead consortium for commissioning more specialised cancer services or to do so through commissioning support organisations.

In addition, health and well-being boards in every upper-tier local authority will provide a mechanism for bringing together local NHS, public health and social care commissioners. This could provide a forum for the development of cross-cutting commissioning approaches to improve cancer services.

The Department and the National Cancer Action Team have previously provided commissioners with a range of commissioning guidance and support, such as 'the Cancer Commissioning Toolkit' and the 'Cancer Commissioning Guidance'. Going forward, this guidance will be developed to reflect what works best in supporting pathfinder GP consortia. In 2011, we will also develop a cancer commissioning support pack to enable commissioners to access in one place the key information they will need to discharge their functions effectively.

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