

Comments on “Independence of Statistics”

Paragraph 4.50 specifically asks for views on the future of the NHS Central Registry within government. Box 1 on page 10 notes that “The primary function of the NHSCR is to compile and maintain a computerised central record of all patients registered with an NHS General Practitioner in England and Wales.” This document provides some views from the *Informing Healthcare* Programme within NHS Wales.

Although responsibility for health in Wales is with the Welsh Assembly Government, this is one area where Wales still shares services with England at present. If the future of the NHSCR is being reviewed, then one aspect should be to consider whether it should retain an “England and Wales” responsibility or whether its responsibilities should be split across the two administrations. Some comments on these possibilities:

If the responsibility of the NHSCR is split:

- There would need to be discussions about how the split is achieved, and any support needed by Wales to establish the function and any support requirements
- One consideration would need to be the scope of the devolved responsibility, i.e. whether this should cover all Welsh residents or all residents registered with Welsh GPs.
- One of the functions of the NHSCR is to allocate NHS numbers; separate ranges of numbers would be needed for England and Wales, to avoid overlap and allow the reciprocal use of numbers to be retained (this would extend the current position where Scotland uses a range of numbers to identify individuals; these are compatible with the NHS number and do not overlap)

If a shared responsibility is retained:

- Wherever it is located within government, it should have reporting arrangements with both the Department of Health and the Welsh Assembly Government, and in particular should be responsive to Welsh requirements

Although not mentioned specifically, the NHSCR uses information systems to support its work, which in addition have the following functions:

- Use by NHS organisations in England and Wales to manage demographic information and to ensure NHS number allocation
- Links to other parts of the ONS for population movements, birth and death notification, and information to support health-related analyses such as and longitudinal studies.
- Has specific responsibility for co-ordinating information flows between the cancer registries of England and Wales, e.g. death notifications.
- As a 'clearing house' to facilitate the request and transfer of paper GP medical records between Wales and England
- Provides a 'back office' function which administers various data quality processes and behalf of both Wales and England
- Handles embarkations
- NHSCR is the link between the MoD and the NHS for enlistments and service dependants

- Used by the NHS Number for Babies (NN4B) process to 'complete the loop' with the civil registration process to ensure completeness of information
- The administration of sensitive records (confusion cases & stop notes)

If the responsibility for the NHSCR is split, the Welsh body (or another part of NHS Wales) would need to establish systems to support the first of these functions in respect of Welsh health organisations, and the second in respect of Welsh residents. In addition, the ONS would need to support separate interfaces for England and Wales.

If the joint responsibility is retained, then arrangements will need to be in place to ensure that Welsh health organisations could continue to use the systems that support demographic information and NHS number allocation, under the same conditions of service as at present. If this could be achieved, then the ONS links could be retained as a joint interface for both England and Wales. However, this possibility is complicated by the National Programme for Information Technology in NHS England; NHS Wales understands that there are plans within this to change the systems that NHSCR uses, which to date have no agreement for the retention of services to Wales. NHS Wales asks that this issue is considered in any discussion on the future of the NHSCR, and that NHS Wales is consulted.

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