An Evaluation of the Role of Kidney Care Network Managers
A Report from NHS Kidney Care

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Better Kidney Care for All
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Foreword

Networks play a key role in the delivery of safe and efficient kidney services to people throughout England. Since the publication of the National Service Framework (NSF) for Renal Services in 2005, kidney care networks have evolved and strengthened, and have been essential to the successful implementation of the NSF.

The Government’s commitment to further developing clinical networks reflects the important role they have played in the past, and it is an encouraging sign that their future will be secure.

The success of a network is largely determined by its constituent parts and, in kidney care, the network manager is the glue that holds these parts together. By looking in detail at the work of three managers, this report demonstrates the relevance of the role within the current healthcare landscape. It is down to the kidney care network manager to ensure that their network delivers the aims and objectives of the national kidney care strategy, and that high quality care is provided to people at every stage of the kidney care pathway.

I would like to thank all the kidney care network managers for the invaluable contribution they make to the continued successful delivery of kidney care services, and especially Ken Chambers, Margaret McQuade and Rebecca Campbell, for giving up their time to provide the information and insight upon which this report is based.

Beverley Matthews
Director – NHS Kidney Care
Clinical networks currently exist across England for a number of different disease areas aimed at providing expertise to help commissioners, providers and patients work together to plan and deliver high quality services. Despite a period of recent uncertainty about the future of networks within the current NHS reforms, in June 2011 the Government announced that it plans to retain and strengthen the clinical networks of experts - including patient and carer representatives - that exist, so that they cover many more areas of specialist care. In addition the Government plans to give networks a stronger role in commissioning, in support of the NHS Commissioning Board and local clinical commissioning groups.

Further to this announcement, NHS Medical Director, Sir Bruce Keogh, stated that there are likely to be three main types of networks; very specialist, e.g. neonatal intensive care; specialist but more generic, e.g. cancer; and higher level generic, e.g. acute care. Kidney services are a vital element of the whole system of care, however the services provided to people with or approaching end stage renal failure are highly specialised in the provision of transplant services and other renal replacement therapies.

Prior to this announcement from the Government, NHS Kidney Care undertook an evaluation exercise to assess the role of the Kidney Care Network Manager in relation to the success of the Kidney Care Networks. In addition, this exercise set out to identify achievements in improved service delivery and examples of good practice as well as barriers to delivering the national kidney care strategy and finally to allow for learning to be shared. This report provides a summary of the key themes that were identified as a result of the evaluation.
About Kidney Care Networks

As part of the national organisation NHS Diabetes and Kidney Care, NHS Kidney Care plays a vital role in improving the services and quality of care received by people with kidney disease by embedding safe, evidence-based examples of what works to enable better outcomes for patients. Patients and carers are at the heart of everything NHS Kidney Care does in the delivery of the NHS Outcomes Framework. This includes sharing evidence-based practice and examples of what works so local organisations can ‘do it once, do it right’; identifying ways to make smart use of NHS resources; and collecting, creating and sharing information and health economic evidence to improve local decision making and support service improvement.
In delivering these objectives NHS Kidney Care prioritised the development of sustainable networks that support integration across care pathways and share the priorities of the organisation at a local level. NHS Kidney Care currently funds the posts of the predominant number of Kidney Care Network Managers including Yorkshire and the Humber (Y&H), the South East Coast (SEC), London, and the North East (NE). In addition, NHS Kidney Care also supports the East of England, South Central and the South West Kidney Care Networks (see Figure 1 below).

In line with the priorities of NHS Kidney Care, Kidney Care Networks aim to provide a level of care that ensures that all patients, from diagnosis of kidney disease, in any setting, at any stage, receive high quality and timely treatment and support. Networks should consist of the Specialised Commissioning Group (SCG) and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) along with the experts within provider trusts, working alongside partners in social care, the community, patients and carers, and voluntary organisations, to ensure that people with kidney disease receive high quality reliable care, while retaining the control, choice and dignity they deserve.

The role of Kidney Care Networks is to provide leadership to the organisations within the network on kidney care policy, and to ensure implementation of kidney care policy across the network area. Although the networks do not have designated resources with which to commission services, with the support of expert clinical input, as well as expert input from patients and carers, they are expected to facilitate agreement between SCG, PCTs and Trusts on commissioning compliant kidney services for the population they serve.

The network manager plays a central role in ensuring that their respective network delivers the aims and objectives of the national kidney care strategy. They are charged with facilitating links between patients and carers, primary, secondary and specialist kidney care services to ensure consistency across the network in terms of access to services and service delivery and ultimately to ensure that high quality care is provided to patients with kidney disease throughout the care pathway.
Methods

In April and May 2011 face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews were carried out with the Kidney Care Network Managers from three of the NHS Kidney Care funded networks; Yorkshire & the Humber, the North East, and the South East Coast. The interviews were conducted in order to explore the role and achievements of the three network managers. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in full and analysed using thematic analysis. The common themes identified were highlighted by at least two of the three networks. However, the limitations of such an evaluation with respect to self reporting and lack of validation should be noted.
Good relationship management
The importance of good relationships throughout networks was highlighted by the Kidney Care Network Managers:

- Developing and/or building upon existing relationships throughout the region with clinicians, GPs, nurses, patients and commissioners.
  Patients with kidney disease may receive a range of services from both primary and secondary care, while patients with more advanced kidney disease, such as CKD 4 or 5, also require specialist kidney care such as transplantation and other renal replacement therapies. As a result, within each Kidney Care Network there is a core team of clinical, commissioning and specialist leads, including patient representatives, from primary and secondary care who are responsible for the delivery of the national kidney care strategy through sharing and encouraging consistency and best practice across the local area.

  The Kidney Care Network Manager plays a central role in facilitating the effectiveness of the network by bringing these key people together to ensure they engage with each other effectively and help senior management decide which areas of service need more resource support and inform commissioning decisions to ensure that the right patients get the right treatment at the right time.

- Maintaining relationships during the NHS Reforms
  A common challenge highlighted by each of the three network managers relates to concerns associated with the current NHS reforms. Relationship management is central to the role of the network manager; as such, concerns were expressed about building relationships with developing GP commissioning consortia/ Clinical Commissioning Groups (which are likely to be numerous in relation to single Kidney Care Networks), maintaining current relationships with PCTs as senior staff leave posts which are not currently being filled, and maintaining the momentum and enthusiasm within each region for the networks. It should be noted that these concerns were expressed prior to the recent announcement of substantial changes to the NHS reform from the Government.

“All renal units are different. With the tariff and all the other changes coming we’re helping to prepare the way to make sure that everything is going to work.”

Ken Chambers, Renal Development Manager, SEC
Key Findings

• **Maintaining and developing relationships with primary care**
The importance of primary care representation within the Kidney Care Network was highlighted. In all cases examples were given of dedicated GPs who bring the expertise of primary care to the network, helping to develop projects that address key issues such as GP education and knowledge around CKD, management of CKD in primary care, as well as inappropriate referrals. However, as with a number of chronic conditions, difficulties arise with the large number of GPs in a region in relation to the relatively small number of patients who have advanced kidney disease.

An example from the Yorkshire and the Humber Network concerns a scheme which has been developed to reduce the number of unnecessary referrals. As 98% of the GPs in Bradford are on the same computer system they’ve developed a process to allow renal unit access to records, with patient consent, allowing kidney specialists to comment on individual patients.

“The GP that’s on our network is doing a brilliant piece of work that’s going to address GP training, knowledge base around CKD. We’re going to get a GP lead from each area, so one from Newcastle, one from Sunderland… which is fantastic to link all the areas up… obviously in early stages but a fantastic project!”

Margaret McQuade, NE Kidney Care Network

• **Maintaining and developing patient and carer involvement**
Patient and carer involvement in the network is largely the responsibility of the Kidney Care Network Manager and is an important and necessary part of the development of quality services for patients with kidney disease. Although patient involvement in the network can work very effectively, concerns were raised about the variation in patient representation across regions within a network and the politics around patient recruitment.

“We do have a GP on our group which has been really helpful. But we’ve tried to get a wider network of GPs and we’ve got a virtual GP sort of renal reference group, but it’s only a handful of people really and for the number of GPs in the region, it’s not really much at all”

Rebecca Campbell, Y&H Kidney Care Network
Key Findings

2  Development of a clear strategy and vision for the network

- **Having a clear vision & strategy throughout the network**
  The Kidney Care Network Manager has a key role to play in supporting and facilitating future planning and strategic direction of the network. The manager needs to ensure that the network develops a clear strategy and vision by providing support and guidance to their local kidney care strategy group.

  The national kidney care strategy is central to the improvement and delivery of kidney services across England. Alignment of the national strategy with the agreed local kidney care strategy of each region is central to the development of an effective network.

  “*We have a strategy and we have a clear vision of where we’re going and so the role is to ensure that happens*”

  Rebecca Campbell, Y&H Kidney Care Network

3  Organisation

- **Developing and maintaining the regional renal strategy groups**
  The core group of experts at the centre of the network, often referred to as the renal strategy group, are key to success of the network. This group has wide ranging interests and expertise and is responsible for developing and delivering the kidney care strategy to the region. In order to provide the overall facilitation and support that the Kidney Care Networks require to work effectively in developing services and delivering improvement, the Kidney Care Network Manager needs to ensure a high level of organisation across the network. This includes forward planning with an agreed schedule of regular meetings and clear agendas to ensure that the best practice is shared and delivered across the network. Providing clear, agreed actions ensures that every member of the network has a clear understanding of their individual responsibility to improving services in their area.

  “*One of the strengths of our network is that we’ve developed a strong core team*”

  Rebecca Campbell, Y&H Kidney Care Network

  “*A lot of my role is facilitating other people to do things and being organised enough to manage the schedule of meetings. We’ve got to have a clear plan*”

  Rebecca Campbell, Y&H Kidney Care Network
Key Findings

Good communication throughout the network

- **Having a communications strategy with a two-way flow of information**
  Good communication skills to ensure that the objectives and developments of the kidney care network are communicated and embedded throughout the whole of the local area are essential. This includes negotiating with senior management both nationally and across the local area, from both statutory and non-statutory organisations. In addition, the network manager must also establish and maintain relationships with other key people throughout the kidney community, including patients and carers, both locally and nationally.

“We help everyone keep up with all the initiatives – and there are a lot – we make sure everything gets sent out to the wider renal community. Some people may see things more than once but we know that others are seeing things they might otherwise have not. But it’s not just one way; there’s a two-way flow of information.”

Ken Chambers, Renal Development Manager, SEC

“What’s made a real difference for us as a region in progressing is to have the core group. We catch up every couple of weeks by teleconference outside of the larger monthly meetings to ensure we keep in touch and discuss any issues”

Rebecca Campbell, Y&H Kidney Care Network

- **Sharing best practice**
  The network manager plays a key role in the development of consistency and equity across the region by ensuring that gaps in service provision are identified and that examples of best practice are shared throughout the network. In the North East, the process of providing home conversions to allow patients to dialyse at home was more efficient and cost effective than the process that was previously adopted in the Middlesbrough area. Shared learning through the network has allowed best practice and learning to be spread across the region, leading to more effective provision of home conversions, while at the same time saving money.

“Getting engagement and building relationships is paramount. We haven’t got a big pot of money but we can still improve service by ways of sharing learning across the network. An important part of this role is getting people connected up.”

Margaret McQuade, NE Kidney Care Network
Support for the networks and the network managers

- **Support and engagement for the network from the clinical team**
  As much as the network manager is responsible for ensuring that members of the network are engaged with the network and each other, support and engagement from the clinical team for both the network manager and the development of the Kidney Care Networks is equally critical. Having enthusiastic, dedicated clinical leads and the on-going, long term dedication of renal staff and doctors were highlighted as essential components of a successful network.

- **Agreement within the network on goals, targets and priorities**
  In addition to support and engagement from the clinical team it is essential that there is agreement from the renal strategy group as a whole for the goals, targets and the priorities of the network. Having the core group committed to the agreed strategy of the network is essential to allow the network manager to carry out their role effectively.

- **Peer support of Kidney Care Network Managers**
  Both formal and informal interaction with other Kidney Care Network Managers was highlighted as an essential supporting factor by each of the network managers interviewed. The network managers provide advice and guidance, a forum to formally discuss issues and ideas as well as provide informal opportunities for network managers to ‘bounce around ideas’ and discuss concerns and issues.

- **Relationship and support from the Director of NHS Kidney Care and National Clinical Director**
  Support for the Kidney Care Networks from both the Director of NHS Kidney Care and the National Clinical Director for Kidney Care can help to provide weight to the role of the Kidney Care Network Manager, listen to frustrations and provide advice when needed.

- **Relationship with SCG renal commissioners**
  Each of the network managers interviewed were line managed by SCG commissioners who are responsible for the commissioning of renal services. This provides support for the Kidney Care Network Manager to ensure that services are commissioned in line with the objectives of the network, as well as support the network manager in their role within the renal strategy group. In addition the network manager is in a position to support the commissioning of renal services in their region. However, the role of the SCG renal commissioner in commissioning renal services for dialysis and transplantation, and not across the kidney care pathway as a whole, was highlighted as a potential issue as the kidney care network is responsible for the entire patient pathway.

“We have a very good renal commissioner, but her role isn’t just renal. I started out supporting her to help everything run smoother. Now it’s about managing relationships so we have agreed priorities.”

Ken Chambers, Renal Development Manager, SEC
Key Findings

6 Time

- **Length of time the network has been in place**
  Successful Kidney Care Networks do not appear overnight. It can take up to a year for a network manager to facilitate and develop the crucial relationships between partners in order to integrate an effective functioning network across the local area. However, the points listed in the sections above are all central to ensuring a more rapid development of a fully integrated Kidney Care Network delivering the aims and objectives of the national kidney care strategy.

> “Over time you gradually get to know people and what the set up is. It took over a year… I think the Network itself was fairly new at that point, so some people voiced their concerns. It’s taken a bit of time for other people to see where the benefit of the Network lies, so that’s been difficult.”

Rebecca Campbell, Y&H Kidney Care Network

7 Achievements

In addition to the accomplishments highlighted above, for example having a clear communications strategy and a clear vision and strategy for the network, the network managers highlighted a range of other specific achievements which reflect the success of the Kidney Care Networks:

- **Funding secured for range of network-wide projects**
  Although the networks themselves have no dedicated funding, the network manager can help to secure funding from additional sources by facilitating shared learning and development of best practice that aims to capture the expertise within the network. Examples include funding in the North East to develop peer support for patients with kidney disease; the Yorkshire and the Humber Network has secured funding from a variety of sources, including The Health Foundation, aimed at increasing self care and choice for patients on dialysis. Other sources of funding include the Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership (HQIP) and the National End of Life Care Programme Board.

- **Individual achievements**
  In addition to the common themes described above, each network highlighted a number of other achievements. These include developing good relationships with patient groups; developing networks within networks, such as a home therapies nurses network and the development of a renal nursing strategy in the North East; appointment of a clinical lead for home therapies and self-care and end of life care in Yorkshire and the Humber, leading to the development of strategies for Home Therapies and Self-Care, and for Conservative Care; mapping exercises in the South East Coast, helping PCTs negotiate renal contracts and working with Kent and Sussex to help transplant patients return home within one month.
Individual challenges
In addition to the common themes highlighted above, individual challenges for each network were highlighted. These included:

- Relationship and overlap with neighbouring networks, in particular London (SEC)
- Debate concerning lack of power within the network without dedicated funding (NE)
- Differing configuration of networks in the region has meant that building relationships with other local clinical networks is challenging (Y&H)

Aspirations
A number of common aspirations were highlighted by the Kidney Network Managers interviewed in this exercise. These include:

- **Further development of key priority areas**
  This includes transport services; end of life and conservative care; transition of care; improving choice, self-care and access to home therapies across the networks; access to Intravenous Iron (IVI) and work to improve services for people with acute kidney injury (AKI).

- **Improve links between primary and secondary care and other clinical networks including cardiac and vascular**

- **Further development in support of the Quality, Improvement and Efficiency agenda**

- **Continue to maintain support and engagement within and for the Network**
The evaluation of the role of the three Kidney Care Network Managers illustrates the role they play in the success of the Kidney Care Network. Good relationship management with the core team including clinical, commissioning and specialist leads from primary and secondary care, as well as patient representatives to ensure that they engage with each other effectively, is essential. In addition, support and engagement from the clinical team for the network and the network manager is equally critical, as is an effective communications strategy. Having an agreed strategy with clear targets and objectives is also essential to support and facilitate the development of services and service improvement which aim to deliver the best possible quality care for patients with kidney disease.

The relationship and shared priorities of NHS Kidney Care and the Kidney Care Networks is a crucial factor in the success of the networks. While the networks play an important role in the delivery of kidney care policy locally and sharing best practice, NHS Kidney Care plays an equally important role in supporting the networks through developing and influencing national policy, driving up efficiency, engineering large scale improvements, reducing unnecessary duplication and developing educational tools to close gaps in knowledge while acting to reduce variations in care and health inequalities throughout England. Although concerns were raised about the current NHS reforms, network managers should be encouraged by the recent Government announcements and continue to develop and build upon the existing and on-going work of NHS Kidney Care and the Kidney Care Networks.

It is important to note that the findings presented here represent the view of only three of the ten Kidney Care Network Managers. In addition these views have not been validated by any other member of the Kidney Care Networks.
References


4. NHS Kidney Care Network Specification: Core Functions & Responsibility. September 2010


Appendix one

Clinical abstract poster presented at the British Renal Society/Renal Association conference in June 2011

Authors: Bailey C1, Barclay M1, Sweeney G1, O’Donoghue D2, and Matthews B1
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**Introduction**

NHS Kidney Care currently funds the posts of 2700 kidney care network managers (including Yorkshire and the Humber (YH), Thames and South East Coast (TSC), London and the North East (NE) and Welsh) on behalf of the NHS. The network managers play a central role in ensuring that their respective networks deliver the aims and objectives of the national kidney care strategy. They are charged with facilitating links (both primary, secondary and hospital services) to ensure consistency across the network in terms of access to services and service delivery thereby to ensure that high quality care is provided to patients with kidney disease throughout the care pathway.

In April and June 2011 face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews were carried out with the Kidney Care Network Manager from three of the four Kidney Care Networks. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in full to provide the basis of individual case studies for each of the four Kidney Care Networks. The aim of this description was to bring the successes of each network, identify achievements, improve service delivery and examples of good practice as well as barriers to delivering the national kidney care strategy and finally examine the role and some of the experiences of the network managers. The results of each of these Kidney Care Networks is presented here. The limitations of this study with respect to self-reporting and lack of validation should be noted.

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**Table 1: Contribution of the Network Manager to a Successful Kidney Care Network**

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<th>Role of the Kidney Care Network Manager</th>
<th>The Work of the Kidney Care Network Manager</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central to is to bring together a network of people in order to share learning, and ensure consistency and equity across the region.</td>
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<tr>
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**Development of a clear strategy and vision for the network.**

The Kidney Care Network Manager has a key role to play in supporting and facilitating future planning and strategic direction of the network. The manager needs to ensure that the networks develop a clear strategy and vision by providing support and good advice to their local kidney care strategy group.

The national kidney care strategy is central to the requirement and delivery of kidney service across England, alignment of the national strategy into the agreed local kidney care strategy of each network is central to the development of an effective network.

**Organisation.**

In order to provide the overall facilitation and support that the Kidney Care Networks requires to work effectively in developing services and delivering improvements, the Kidney Care Network Manager needs to ensure a high level of organisation across the network. This includes: forward planning with an agreed schedule of regular meetings and clear agendas to ensure that the best practices is shared and delivered across the network. Providing clear, agreed actions ensures that every member of the network has a clear understanding of their individual responsibilities to improving services in their area.

**Development of a good communications strategy throughout the network.**

Good communication skills to ensure that the objectives and developments of the kidney care network are communicated and embedded throughout the whole of the local area are essential. This includes negotiating with senior management both nationally and across the local area, having both statutory and non-statutory organisations, in addition the network manager must also establish and maintain relationships with other key people throughout the kidney community both locally and nationally.

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**References:**


www.kidneycare.nhs.uk

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