

London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

EARLY IDEAS FOR NHS POLICY GIVEN RAPID EVALUATION BY EXPERTS

What could be offered to dementia patients as an alternative to anti-psychotic drugs? Should payment for drug and alcohol rehabilitation programmes depend on how long people stay clean when they are discharged? Could changes to dental contracts improve patient care?

These are the kinds of questions facing the NHS and social care, which will be informed by the work of a new research unit led by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. The Policy Research Unit in Policy Innovation Research (PIRU) was formed with partners at LSE and Imperial College London earlier this year with £4.5m funding over five years from the Department of Health's Policy Research Programme. The Unit will provide advice and support in the early stages of policymaking to ensure that innovations are both capable of being evaluated and generate learning for policy development; thus helping to embed evidence-based decision-making by the Government. In some cases, the Unit may also carry out early-stage evaluation of policy proposals.

Speaking as the Unit is officially launched at the School, Nicholas Mays, Professor of Health Policy, says: "This is the first time a unit of this kind has been set up. It is unique because it involves early engagement between the Department of Health and our team to co-produce rigorous research evidence to inform the early stages of policy innovation. This approach should benefit patients by helping to link academic expertise with those who make the decisions from the start. We are not politicians and will remain independent at all times but we are looking forward to bringing our knowledge to health and care policy in this innovative way."

PIRU joins one other new DH Policy Research Programme funded research initiative based at LSHTM: the Policy Research Unit in Commissioning and the Healthcare System, a collaboration with the University of Manchester. The Director of the ongoing DH Policy Research Programme funded Public Health Research Consortium is also based at LSHTM.

Ends

:: For further information or to interview Professor Mays, please contact the LSHTM press office on 0207 927 2802 or email paula.fentiman@lshtm.ac.uk

Notes to Editors

:: PIRU

PIRU brings together experts in health care research and evaluation methodology to improve evidence-based policy-making and its implementation across the NHS, public health and social care Government in a number of ways including clarifying what is already known, helping to develop pilots and advising on evaluation design.

:: Policy Research Unit in Commissioning and Health Systems

The purpose of PRUComm is to undertake research on commissioning (determining the healthcare needs of the local community and then purchasing or arranging for specific services to provided).

:: Public Health Research Consortium

The Public Health Research Consortium (PHRC) brings together senior researchers from 11 UK institutions. The programme aims to strengthen the evidence base for interventions to improve health, with a strong emphasis on tackling socioeconomic inequalities in health. The PHRC is built around a set of research projects led by senior researchers with expertise in public health, social epidemiology, sociology, survey and evaluation research, social marketing and health economics. The Consortium links teams across eight universities, a survey research agency, a children's charity and a Public Health Observatory (PHO), and is directed by Mark Petticrew.

:: About the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) is a renowned research-led postgraduate institution of public health. Its mission is to contribute to the improvement of health in the UK and worldwide through the pursuit of excellence in research, postgraduate teaching and advanced training in national and international public health and tropical medicine, and through informing policy and practice in these areas. Part of the University of London, the School is the largest institution of its kind in Europe with a remarkable depth and breadth of expertise encompassing many disciplines associated with public health.