

Commissioning and Performance

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The PSSRU has been carrying out research in this area for many years. In this article we discuss three projects, one completed and two ongoing, which look at the mechanisms through which care for older people is provided. Information on our evaluation of the Innovations Forum can be found on page 32.

Older people residential care provider study 2002/03

This study has examined the motivations, behaviours and policy environments of 57 establishments in eight English local authority areas, capturing both 'small business' 'corporate', and council (in house) forms of governance.

Provider motivations

As with previous research, we established the presence of a complex mix of motivations (see previous editions of this Bulletin). We used principal component analysis (a type of factor analysis) to summarise how these motivations tend to be grouped and prioritised. Four 'components' were isolated as capturing the configurations, reflecting not only motives' presence, but the weight attributed to them by providers. *Professional motivations*, *financial motivations* and two kinds of *caring motivation* (for older people, and more general caring for the vulnerable) emerged as dominant. Sector of ownership or corporate status were not significantly linked to the patterning of these 'components'.

We also explored the extent to which these 'component' groups of motivations were linked to a variety of aspects of provider relationships with local authorities. The research revealed a positive correlation between the intensity of professional motivation and the level of involvement in local authority-led care planning and reviews, consistent with the significance of structured opportunities as an outlet for the expression of professional values.

Relationships with regulators

There has been major turbulence in regulatory arrangements nationally, but the research showed that most providers were at ease with the local arrangements for regulatory implementation, and have developed appropriately supportive relationships (81% indicating they were satisfied or very satisfied with their local relationships, compared to 54% satisfied more generally about their regulatory environment). Most enthusiasm for the new regime was concentrated amongst the large corporate operators. However, amongst all providers, the presence of certain conditions and practices were seen as supportive. This included the cultivation of an ongoing process of communication; realism associated with a capacity to empathise; sensible allocation of the time taken to inspect between regulations relating to structures, processes and user welfare; and acceptance of the negotiability of subjective judgements for standards with relatively intangible characteristics.

Direct payments research

The Department of Health has commissioned the PSSRU to lead an evaluation of the implementation of the Direct Payments Development Fund (DPDF) in England. The evaluation, which builds on our existing research

The Direct Payments Survey

The Direct Payments Survey was a national postal questionnaire on direct payments policies and practices undertaken in 2004/05. This collaborative project has been led by the C&P team at PSSRU and combines the work of three multidisciplinary research teams currently involved in national studies of direct payments. The Direct Payments Survey is backed by the Department of Health, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Modernisation of Adult Social Care Initiative. Findings will be disseminated in 2005.

For further details see: <http://www.pssru.ac.uk/dps.htm>

interest in this topic, seeks to examine the effectiveness of direct payment (DP) implementation methods. We work closely with the National Centre for Independent Living (NCIL) and the National Direct Payments Steering Group, and have also collaborated with other researchers in gathering national data (see survey box).

The DPDF provides funds to resource activities led by voluntary organisations providing support to direct payment (DP) users, with the aim of improving user-level outcomes. A key objective for the research is to consider the impact of direct payments on older people. We investigate how these are affected by individual circumstances and how these are mediated by the provision of various forms of support in twelve local authority evaluation sites.

Implementing DPs involves a shift in employer responsibility to users, and therefore a loss of the administrative role of 'traditional' service providing organisations or agencies. The evaluation examines how the characteristics of employment in the new DP workforce differ from this 'traditional' workforce. The study is also evaluating the success of the DPDF in increasing the levels and scope of support available to DP users, and increasing the pool of DP users. Data from the Direct Payments Survey (see box) will provide the comparative data on local authorities required to evaluate the impact of the DPDF.

Indicators of costs and intensity of DP support provided and direct payments provision will be drawn from the nationwide DP Survey. Where possible this data on value for money will be interpreted against the outcome indicator results. Direct payments are likely to have profound and probably enduring effects on local social care economies, with ramifications for local authorities. The evaluation is looking at the latter's roles and responsibilities in relation to service users and their caring families, providers, and the social care workforce.

Statistical modelling has also been undertaken. The research has involved secondary analysis using a range of official data sources to identify the range of local factors which shape both variations in the take up and package intensity of DPs between local authorities.

Local variability in social care across England

An important strand of analysis of the Commissioning and Performance programme at PSSRU LSE is analysing variability in key features of social care services in England. Using primarily quantitative data at the local level, the study aims are:

- To assess the extent and patterns through time of local variability in key features of local authority social care in England, focusing on financing, targeting, public/private provision and efficiency.
- To explore the likely sources of such variation, distinguishing between demand and supply factors, and accounting for the mediating effect of local preferences and organisational features of social service departments.
- To analyse their implications for local performance levels, examining both process and outcome indicators.

The study is placing particular emphasis on geographical and longitudinal patterns. It aims to investigate in detail (i) spatial patterns to capture shared demand side influences and potential learning processes across authorities and (ii) longitudinal patterns, to explore the effect of key government initiatives on local authorities with different characteristics.

References

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