

Accountable care organisation for Northumberland

As part of our vanguard work to further improve integration of services in Northumberland, we are now well on our way to developing an 'accountable care organisation' or 'ACO'. The following information explains what it's all about...

- **What is an ACO?**

An 'accountable care organisation' is a partnership between all of the different parts of the NHS in Northumberland who are responsible for commissioning and providing health services. It is completely new in the NHS and is something which we are pioneering ahead of anyone else in the country. In Northumberland the ACO partners are Northumbria Healthcare, NHS Northumberland CCG, the 44 GP practices who provide primary care services, the ambulance service, mental health services, Newcastle Hospitals who provide specialist services for our population and, importantly, Northumberland County Council who have statutory responsibilities around public health and social care provision.

- **What will the ACO in Northumberland do?**

The purpose of the ACO is to bring together all the different organisations that have a part to play in looking after people in Northumberland. The aim is to better co-ordinate care, make sure patient and carer experiences are as seamless as possible and support people to stay healthy and well. To do this in Northumberland, all of the ACO partners will be working towards a set of shared quality objectives with everybody focussed on keeping people healthy and well.

- **What shared objectives will the ACO partners work to?**

With the help of the King's Fund we are developing a set of quality indicators that will measure the success of the ACO and drive continuous quality improvement across our system. These shared objectives will be largely focused on:

- Improving the overall health of the population in Northumberland and supporting people to lead healthy lifestyles and to protect themselves from illness – this will include working with communities and wider partners to tackle some of the big causes of ill health like smoking, alcohol consumption and obesity.
- Making sure people have access to services when they need them, that they receive care which is well coordinated, person-centred and that they have a positive experience.



- Supporting people with long-term health and care needs to improve their quality of life by empowering them to manage their own health and maintain independence.
- Reducing unplanned hospital admissions and the time people spend in hospital and making sure we help people recover from illness or injury and stay healthy after treatment.
- Making sure that people are always cared for in a safe environment, protected from avoidable harm and that people with mental health conditions have parity of esteem when they use local services.
- Supporting people at the end of their lives with services which are responsive to their own individual needs and preference.

A big focus will also be on making sure we support our staff across the entire NHS workforce and making sure we support the many other carers who provide care and support looking after their loved ones.

- **Why is an ACO different to what happens now?**

The main difference is the way that funding will flow in the new ACO system. Instead of commissioners holding the budget and having lots of different contracts with lots of different service providers, there will be one holistic, capitated budget to serve the needs of the whole population in Northumberland and the ACO partners will decide the best way to use this. This will allow funds to flow where they are needed and will incentivise health and care providers to keep people well, rather than contracts being negotiated based on historic usage of services and not necessarily what is best for patient care in future.

- **What are the main benefits of an ACO model and a capitated budget for the whole population?**

A capitated budget means we will be moving away from the historic model of providers, like Northumbria Healthcare, being paid based on activity levels and towards a system where money will flow where it is needed most for patient care.

A good example of why this ACO model is important is the reduction in emergency admissions we have seen since implementing the new model of emergency care. Since opening The Northumbria hospital and having access to fast diagnosis and senior clinical decision making seven days a week, we have reduced emergency admissions to hospital and saved the local healthy economy over £6million in just one year. In the old system, where providers are paid based on activity levels, this would mean Northumbria Healthcare losing out on this income, however in the new ACO model, providers will not be financially penalised for doing what is right and best for patients.



It is about the whole system working together and every ACO partner becoming accountable (and focused on) patient outcomes rather than activity levels. As providers, it also means an incentive for preventing illness and keeping people well, rather than solely providing care when it is needed.

- **What does the ACO model mean for Northumbria Healthcare?**

Northumbria Healthcare will be the host provider of the new ACO partnership and will hold the formal contract and budget for all core health services in Northumberland. The trust will be working with all the ACO partners to manage how this money is invested in patient care, based on the needs of the population and working towards the achievement of the ACO's shared quality objectives.

- **What will happen to NHS Northumberland CCG?**

The CCG will continue to exist as a statutory body which is required by law and will retain responsibility for strategic oversight of the health and care system in Northumberland. This will include monitoring the delivery of shared quality objectives, holding ACO partners to account and oversight of public engagement and consultation requirements on any proposals for service change. Most importantly, in the new ACO model, strategic commissioning will be delivered through a shared support structure between Northumberland Council and the CCG to help maximise the opportunities for an integrated approach across NHS services, social care and public health.

- **When will these changes take place?**

We have already begun the new strategic commissioning arrangements in September 2016. From April 2017, the Northumberland ACO will become fully operational. All ACO partners will continue to exist as statutory organisations in their own right and continue with their own boards and governing bodies, but the ACO model will allow different organisations to work in a much more joined up way towards the same goals for high quality patient care.

- **What does it mean for me as a member of staff?**

Staff across all different parts of our health and social care system should find it easier to work together across organisational boundaries and to do the right thing for patients without unnecessary barriers. The development of an ACO goes hand in hand with the work taking place in Northumberland to deliver a primary and acute care system which aims to help staff work more effectively together and particularly to look after those who are most vulnerable. There are already many examples of where this is happening, with teams of professionals coming together and the introduction of shared health records already starting to facilitate much better joined-up working.



- **Why will an ACO approach be better for patient care and outcomes?**

In Northumberland we already have a very strong history of working together across health and social care to join up services for patients but we know this can be even better. Building on these strong foundations of integrated working and in particular with the support of local authority colleagues, the ACO system means we can go even further and faster to create a highly efficient system which allows patients to access the highest possible quality of care when they need it. The aim is also to help switch the overall focus of health and care services onto prevention and to improve our local population's health so that we can reduce the high over reliance, which currently exists, on NHS services and in particular on hospital-based care.

- **Why is this just happening in Northumberland and not North Tyneside?**

In Northumberland, the health and care system has very strong partnerships which have evolved and developed over several years thanks to very close working, in particular with the local authority. For example, Northumbria Healthcare is one of very few organisations in the NHS who already deliver adult social care on behalf of Northumberland County Council, as well as community health and hospital services. This level of integration which already exists and the relationships which have grown over the past ten years, has allowed us to progress plans for an ACO model at a much quicker pace in Northumberland than we have been able to in North Tyneside. We are, however, continuing to work very closely with all partners in North Tyneside to think about how we can develop new ways of working which will help us meet some of the future challenges facing the NHS.

