
Remedy for improving patient care in NHS

AN innovative social franchising system to improve certain services in NHS hospitals has been suggested by Mark Abell, of the law firm Bird & Bird.

He proposes that NHS Trusts that have developed the most successful systems, typically for the quality of patient care, should act as franchisors and franchise them to less successful NHS Trusts.

He describes the process as “the collaborative mutualisation of best practice” and points out that franchising would work as the trusts were originally created as competitive, independent financial entities in the hope that it would make them more efficient.

“In the wake of the Mid-Staffs scandal and the ensuing government review into NHS management and practices, franchising could well be the way forward,” he says.

“Peer-to-peer social franchising in the NHS would help trusts generate new income streams as well as ensuring that their funds are spent in the most cost effective manner. Moreover, it will encourage a race to the top in the quality of care pathways.”

Care pathways

Explaining how his plan would work, Abell continues: “Franchising would involve the NHS developing a best-of-breed certification system that could be applied to its various care pathways.

“This certification would be based on the patient care, financial management and so on of the trusts, such as A&E and paediatrics.

“An NHS Trust that has developed a business-format for the operation of a particular care pathway would apply for certification. It would, of course, have to provide objective evidence that its performance met the relevant standards.

“These certified systems would then be offered to other trusts, which wish to adopt them in return for an ongoing fee and periodic quality audits.

“This will inevitably be some what different to commercial franchising to which we are all familiar. For one thing, most trusts would become both franchisors

and franchisees – franchising out their own systems to other trusts, whilst at the same time becoming franchisees themselves of trusts that have created best-of-breed systems for other branches of healthcare.

“Franchising in the healthcare sector is nothing new,” adds Abell. “It is already used by a variety of health service providers outside the NHS, including optical chains (Boots, Specsavers), dental businesses (White Cross), geriatric care providers (Home Instead, Brightcare), chiropractices (NuSpine), medical practitioners (Appletree Medical Group, Canada; Doctors Express U.S.; and Apollo Hospitals, India).”

Abell makes it clear that franchising can’t be used to regulate or insure the provision of technical clinical excellence.

“That is a matter for the medical profession,” he says. “Franchising can, however, ensure that medical services are managed and delivered in the most efficient, cost effective and patient service-oriented manner possible.” **FW**
