

Introducing NHS Supply2Health - where demand meets supply

Introduction

Wednesday 1st October 2008 sees the launch of a national website designed to help PCTs link up with providers of health and social care services.

Called NHS Supply2Health, the website will advertise opportunities to provide health and social care services to the NHS in England and will announce which organisations have been awarded contracts.

Simplifying the system

Up until now, PCTs have advertised service opportunities in a range of ways - for example via local and national press. This has required providers to keep a close eye on a very broad range of publications. One independent sector provider told us:

“The process of searching for new contract opportunities has proved to be more complicated and unpredictable than I anticipated. As I began to actively search for adverts and tried to find specific contracts that had been referred to elsewhere, it soon became clear that there was no foolproof search method or single, reliable source to rely on.”

Now clinical services providers can visit www.supply2health.nhs.uk to search quickly and easily for available opportunities by location and category, and can also monitor contract award announcements. They will also be given the option of signing up for email notifications of opportunities recently posted on the site in areas that interest them.

Mike Parish, Chief Executive of the independent sector provider Care UK, said: "We welcome the launch of NHS Supply2Health. It will ensure that, for the first time, all the PCT-led contracts that we may be in a position to bid for will be easy to find and consistently presented."

Meeting legal requirements

NHS Supply2Health was developed as part of a suite of system management tools set out in the Operating Framework for the NHS for 2008/9 (published December 2007) to support openness and scrutiny, including *Principles And Rules for Cooperation And Competition*. These products, which include the *PCT Procurement Guide* and national standard contracts, support the principles of transparency, objectivity and non-discrimination in NHS commissioning. The recently established Cooperation and Competition Panel will be able to make recommendations where commissioners are not acting in accordance with these principles.

In cases where PCTs are seeking to appeal to an international marketplace, commissioners may still opt to advertise their tenders elsewhere including in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) but in all cases the opportunity will appear on NHS Supply2Health at the same time.

Roll out, training and ongoing support

Primary Care Contracting (PCC) has been working closely with NHS Supply2Health to ensure that all PCTs have the opportunity for hands on training on the new system. A series of six half-day workshops took place in September and further training materials including presentations from the workshops, helpsheets and FAQs, as well as a dedicated helpdesk for policy and technical queries are available to support implementation. [www.pcc.nhs.uk/supply2health]

Timescales

Use of NHS Supply2Health becomes mandatory for all competitively tendered contracts where a PCT is the lead contracting authority from **1 October 2008** when commissioning Part B competitively tendered clinical services.

CALLOUT 1**Piloting success**

PCTs in the South Central SHA region have been piloting the system since June 2008. Maureen Coxon, Head of Primary Care at Southampton PCT attended the pilot training event in Newbury in June and has been using NHS Supply2Health together with other colleagues. Maureen's view is that PCTs will find the system simple and practical: "The system is very straightforward and easy to use. It will help us to ensure our procurement is fair and transparent and to obtain the best outcomes for patients through improved quality for competed tenders"

CALLOUT 2**Further information:**

Access NHS Supply2Health at www.supply2health.nhs.uk

Training and support for PCTs can be found at www.pcc.nhs.uk/supply2health

More information on procurement can be found on the DH website at www.dh.gov.uk