

**A REVIEW OF CHANGES IN CHILDREN'S HEALTH SERVICES
IN THE UK WITH SOME PRACTICAL EXAMPLES**

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Children's Health Services

1. Summary

Children's services are going through an era of change. This is influenced by changes in epidemiology of children's diseases and the patterns of service uptake; new methods of service delivery in paediatrics and related specialties; shortages of skilled staff, the development of the internal market in the UK, and the requirements of professional training bodies. Over-riding this is a changing attitude about the needs of children and the necessity to view children's services in a coordinated way in order to meet those needs. It is no longer acceptable to hospitalise children unless this is entirely appropriate and most children in hospital are either experiencing ever shorter stays, or have complex medical needs.

Throughout the UK there are examples of reviews and changes to children's services prompted by several of these influences. Change is acknowledged as necessary but the direction of change is often difficult to agree given the diversity of key interests. These interested parties include children and their families, the local and wider public, GPs and community health staff, hospital staff, professional bodies and in some cases, medical training establishments.

This report has detailed examples of change in children's services throughout the UK. The common theme is the need to procure a safe, high quality and up to date service. However this can lead to options that may conflict with a local, geographically convenient service. Districts have examined a wide range of service solutions to this conflict, and it is clear that there is no agreed single 'correct' solution. This is mirrored at national level by the lack of consensus among opinion leaders about the optimal pattern of service provision, although there is a widespread agreement on the need for units which offer a safe service with adequate training facilities. Local changes have also led purchasers to adopt a range of approaches to consultation with local key interests. The issue of children's services is always a sensitive one locally and districts have adopted the most pragmatic solutions which suit their particular circumstances.