

Government reorganisation of the NHS has failed to boost community care in England

Ever since the Health and Social Care Act of 2013, one of the key aims of government has been to cut back on the number of patients turning up at A&E or being referred to hospital specialists and have them cared for instead within the primary care or community care sector. Hospital care is very expensive so this was a way of cutting NHS costs. According to a recent study, this hasn't worked.

In fact, the study has found that the rate of people going into hospital between 2013 and 2015 has remained static. And by the end of 2015, the number of referrals to specialists had actually increased by 19 per cent. According to one of the authors of the report, James Lopez Bernal of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. " ... we know that the idea was to shift more care into the community, and our findings suggest that's not been happening ... and, if anything, the increase in specialist visits may have led to cost increases'.

The reports suggested a number of possible reasons why specialist visits and hospitalisations did not decrease. One was the top-down management of health services by CCGs: 'some GPs do not feel fully engaged with their CCG. ... many GPs feel detached from their CCG and under little pressure to make cost savings or unable to influence the way local health services are managed.'

The study also suggested that the number of people being treated in hospital rather than at local community level was actually appropriate, 'resulting in little scope for further reduction. This is supported by evidence that variations in referral rates in the NHS are primarily

explained by characteristics of the patient population and not factors affecting GP services.'

The increase in hospital visits may actually have been a consequence of changes in how the NHS is managed:

'...the new responsibility for managing budgets has inadvertently increased administrative workload for GPs, resulting in less time to see patients. ... There is some existing evidence to suggest that increased workload and reduced consultation time is associated with increased referral rates...'

The study describes the increased cost to the NHS of the increase in specialist referrals as an 'unintended consequence' of the government's reorganisation of the NHS.

A report on this study was carried in the [New Scientist](#), 18 Nov 2017. The full report was published in [PLOS Medicine](#), 14 November 2017.

