

OSC Soft Tissue Sarcoma Questions and Answers

What are Specialised Services?

Specialised services involve complex treatments or packages of care, often for relatively rare conditions. The services may involve the use of specialised technology, equipment and/or drugs, or be delivered by a specialist expert workforce. Some, but not all, specialised services are high-cost. To be most safe and cost effective specialised services need to be planned and commissioned using populations of at least 1 million, which is larger than most Primary Care Trusts, with many of the rarer conditions needing much larger planning populations than this. Consequently, specialised services are not provided in every hospital and tend to be found only in larger ones, which perhaps provide a range of specialised services. It is for these reasons that specialised services are commissioned on behalf of the Primary Care Trusts that sit within the boundaries of their strategic health authority.

What is the South West Specialised Commissioning Group?

The South West Specialised Commissioning Group is one of 10 such groups established across England. It consists of the Chief Executives of the 14 Primary Care Trusts in the South West. Each regional Specialised Commissioning Group is the body that makes decisions about the commissioning of specialised services within its boundaries. The South West Specialised Commissioning Group shares its boundaries with the South West Strategic Health Authority (NHS South West). The population it serves is just over 5 million.

What is the Specialised Commissioning Team?

The South West Specialised Commissioning Group is served by a dedicated multi-disciplinary Specialised Commissioning Team that consists of commissioners, finance and public health experts, administrators and a public and patient involvement/engagement facilitator. The region's 14 Primary Care Trusts plan, commission and procure specialised services through this team.

What is soft tissue sarcoma?

Soft tissue sarcomas are a rare and diverse group of cancers thought to have a common origin, arising from cells making up the bone, cartilage, muscle, blood vessels, nerves and/or fat in the human body. Soft tissue sarcomas can occur anywhere in the soft tissue of the body, which means that signs and symptoms, treatments options, and prognosis vary greatly.

Soft tissue sarcoma is rare, and accounts for 1% of all malignant tumours; it is the 23rd most common cancer type. However, it is expected that the incidence of soft tissue sarcoma is somewhat higher, due to the difficulty of diagnosis and the complexity of the way that hospital's code people's illnesses. In addition, soft tissue sarcoma incidence increases with age, and therefore it is expected that the diagnosis of sarcoma will continue to rise as birth rate and life expectancy in the UK increase.

What is 'Service Planning' and what does it involve?

Planning a service involves conducting a health needs assessment and comparing how services are currently being delivered with current evidence-based best practice. The views of local clinical experts, voluntary organizations, patients and the public are sought throughout the process so that these are reflected in the preferred model of the service that is described in the 'service specification' that is the end product of planning a service. The 'service specification' is a written description of what a service for the region would consist of.

What is Commissioning/Designation and what does it involve?

Commissioning is the term used to describe the overall process of planning, funding, procuring, and monitoring healthcare services.

Designation is a new way of commissioning that has emerged following Lord Carter's review of the commissioning arrangements for specialised services in 2007 and Lord Darzi's (2008) vision for delivering a world leading NHS (commonly known as 'world class commissioning'). World class commissioning takes a strategic, long-term and community focused approach to commissioning services, where patients, carers, commissioners and health and social care professionals work together to plan services in order to deliver improved local health outcomes.

Designation involves reviewing national best-practice guidelines and improving outcomes guidance, and developing criteria against which interested providers will be measured; identifying relevant stakeholders (both lay and clinical); conducting local risk and health needs assessments; developing a work programme in collaboration with local stakeholders; holding stakeholder events to gain the views and opinions of local clinicians and members of the public at every stage in the designation process; producing an interim designation report that makes recommendations for how a service should develop; seeking approval from the Specialised Commissioning Group (i.e. the chief executives of the 14 Primary Care Trusts in the region) and the strategic health authority to proceed; and asking the 16 overview and scrutiny committees in the region to formally consider the proposal before a final designation report can be submitted to the Specialised Commissioning Group for approval so that the service developments being proposed can be implemented.

A provider's designation status is intended to last for 5 years, after which the situation is reviewed again.

What does this mean for patients?

Designation can result in a change to the number of providers of a service, a change to the way in which services are delivered, or a change in the location of a service. However, designation can also be simply a confirmation of the quality of the current services. In some instances, there will be an impact on patients – for example, how far they will need to travel to access services.

In the case of soft tissue sarcoma, the South West Specialised Commissioning Group plans to designate two centres in the South West. Ensuring equity and facilitating access to services for patients and their families are components of the service specification that providers will be asked to provide.

The result of the service improvement will be high quality, safe services which will:

- Ensure the quality of clinical services across the two Cancer Networks served by these centres
- Improve earlier detection and safeguard accurate diagnosis of sarcoma
- Ensure patients receive the highest quality sarcoma treatment delivered by a multidisciplinary team working together
- Improve clinical outcomes and survival rates over time
- Improve the patient experience through a stronger care pathway

What is Procurement and how is this managed?

Procurement refers to how the Specialised Commissioning Group goes about purchasing services. This includes the contractual agreement that the Specialised Commissioning Group has with providers (e.g. foundation trusts). In total, procurement is a process that includes public and patient involvement and competitive tendering to ensure the best value for money.

Contracts tend to last for a period of 5 years.

How do I get more involved in specialised services planning and commissioning?

- Talk to patients who require the services
- Talk to the hospitals and organisations which provide the services
- Talk to fellow members of the public
- Talk to members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees
- Contact the Primary Care Trust
- Look on the internet for information on the services
- Attend Public and Patient Engagement events
- Use SW SCG website

How do I find out more about this service issue?

Contact Lou Farbus, Public and Patient Engagement Facilitator on 01392 314646 / 07525 123 636 or via lfarbus@nhs.net