

Case-study 8.6.1

Social and Environmental Impact Assessment Of University Hospital Lewisham ... work in progress

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Aim

A research project is underway at UHL looking at the rationale, feasibility and benefit of a social and environmental impact assessment of an NHS Trust and a General Practice in Lewisham, SE London.

Background

Amongst health professionals, the link between good health and social and environmental conditions is now well accepted. It can be argued that disruption to social cohesion and social capital, local economic and employment opportunities and loss of amenity space for example infer a detrimental health effect. This means that, as well as direct hazards, risks and gains to health, any assessment of the health impact of an organisation's activities or a proposed development needs to take social, economic and environmental impacts and issues into consideration. This sits well with the sustainability agenda that is increasingly recognising health as an essential but often missing element. Further, this implies that the remit of HIA needs to be based on a very broad and inclusive understanding of the antecedents of health.

Project

The key argument driving this project is that one person's health should not, and ultimately cannot be maintained at the expense of another's, or through the excessive use of natural resources. Hospitals and other health care organisations therefore should be exemplary in their impact on the wellbeing of all people and the natural environment.

Measuring the impact a hospital has on the health of its local population or the nation is a complex task. The aim is to identify and monitor some indirect and inferred social and environmental influences on health –locally (through employment, for example) and wider afield (through contributions to climate change, for example). A tool is being developed based on the principles and procedures developed for social audit by the New Economics Foundation. This includes the identification of and participation/consultation of all stakeholder groups in both the discovery of relevant indicators and impacts, and in the evaluation of social and environmental performance.

The target audience

Impact reports will be produced for stakeholders such as staff, patients and the local community, as well as for the hospital managers. Results of the research project and details of the audit tool will be made widely available.

Project duration

The project will run for 2 years.

Outputs

Final process, outcome results, and lessons learnt will be available in 2001.

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