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An interview with Professor Steve Field of the Future Forum

Integration could be the key for the future of the NHS, says Professor Field

The *BJGP* had a few minutes with Professor Steve Field to discuss the next stage of the Future Forum:

'The feedback from the first stage of the Forum has been overwhelmingly positive,' says Professor Field, who chaired the forum, 'but there is still a lot more to be done.'

Since the Future Forum published its findings in June, the Secretary of State for Health has agreed the next phase of the listening exercise and they will be reporting again on four new areas. Professor Field said:

'The new key focus areas to examine now will be integrated care, public health, information in the NHS and also education and training.'

'We are still setting the timetable exactly, but hope to begin to deliver on these new areas in November.'

On integration he said:

'We heard very clearly the message that patients and clients involved in receiving health and social care as well as professionals believe that the way forward is integrating care for patients and for their communities. NHS commissioners and local authorities should be jointly responsible for improving outcomes, where they depend on joint working.'

'We need to look at incentivising people to work together, whether that's GPs working with community nurses, or whether it's health and social care working together more seamlessly, or also whether it's primary and secondary care.'

He went on to say:

'We still need to work out the details of how this will be done. This is a listening exercise and we will listen to patients, professionals and professional organisations including royal colleges see what they say.'

The Chief Executive of the NHS has challenged the forum to be 'radical' with its next stage, so we asked what this will mean for the forum.

'This means it's going to be about what we hear from patients, carers and health care professionals. We want to look at how best to exploit the modernisation programme to improve what we've got.'

'What I'm not going to do is write a report that just reiterates what's already there, we need to look at opportunities and improve the patient experience and quality of care. We must address unacceptable variations in the quality. We also need to ask how do we create a culture where innovation can take hold, people can work together and we can remove the barriers that stop us moving towards a better integrated system?'

We also asked Professor Field if he thought that the government are on board with the recommendations of the forum, and he said:

'Yes, they've taken on board what we've said and in some areas have gone further, taking forward what we've recommended. Now it's up to the legislation experts to deliver a bill that works on what we want.'

He continued:

'I felt very encouraged by the amount of time devoted to the Future Forum personally by the Prime Minister. I really believe that David Cameron, Nick Clegg, and Andrew Lansley believe in the values of the NHS laid down in the NHS Constitution and by accepting our recommendations have demonstrated that they have been prepared to listen and work with health professionals, patients and the public to deliver an NHS fit for the future.'

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