

News

Allergy services in England and Wales need better leadership to develop

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The Department of Health should designate a strategic health authority as a single lead to act as a national resource and drive improvements in care of people with allergies in England and Wales, a report has recommended.

Too many doctors who treat patients with allergies are still working in isolation and lack clear leadership and incentives, such as inclusion in the Quality and Outcomes Framework, which rewards GPs for the care they provide, says the report from the Royal College of Physicians and Royal College of Pathologists.

The report says that "leadership is essential for allergy services to develop and begin to attain the level of service that is available in most of Western Europe."

Having a lead strategic health authority would help regional allergy services to share information and evaluate their care. But leadership at a regional level is also needed to support training and research.

Although some progress has been made towards the recommendations laid out by the House of Lords science and technology committee in its 2007 inquiry into allergy (*BMJ* 2007;335:633, doi:[10.1136/bmj.39348.851968.BE](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.39348.851968.BE)), "progress has been slow and non-existent" in many areas, says the report.

The report, which maps progress against each of the recommendations in the House of Lords inquiry, acknowledges that the health department has withdrawn inappropriate dietary advice to pregnant women, that guidance from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence on assessment and diagnosis of food allergy in children has been widely adopted, and that paediatric care pathways are being developed.

In its report the House of Lords recommended that each strategic health authority should have an allergy centre with "clusters" of expertise from doctors and nurses with an interest in allergy, but these have made limited progress, largely because of the lack of specialists.

The report says that although five new training posts in allergy and five in immunology have been created nationally, many patients may be seeing doctors without appropriate training and without access to appropriate tests. And the expertise that does exist is not being shared or used to train others.

It recommends that one "potential way of laying the foundations for future development of specialist allergist-led hubs" is better networking among existing services and staff.

Bill Egner, secretary to the working party and representing the Royal College of Pathologists and the British Society for Immunology, said, "We can do better, and allergy services can still improve, despite the current financial climate. A coalition of partners from patients to specialists are ready and willing—they merely need appropriate facilitation of clinical leadership and intelligent direction from the Department of Health and primary care trust commissioners to make it a reality."

He said that many health managers give allergy services too low a priority and that "the wealth of experience" in the allergy community should be put to better use.

The report recommends that primary care trusts, which have largely shown little interest in developing allergy services, should collaborate with local hospitals to improve care closer to patients' homes.

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Allergy Services: Still Not Meeting the Unmet Need is available at www.rcplondon.ac.uk.