



Commissioning a competent surgical service College position statement

The Royal College of Surgeons believes that a defined standard of treatment and care set by the profession should drive commissioning and not the commercial interests or convenience of the provider. Standards of care and outcome requirements should be incorporated into the decision-making process for commissioning services in order to achieve the best care and outcomes for patients. Within the proposed arrangements for the delivery of healthcare, commissioners will be able to exercise clinical judgement and have the power to safeguard and ensure the quality and standard of care.

The College believes that in order to ensure the delivery of comprehensive and competent services commissioners should adhere to the following principles and standards when taking commissioning decisions:

1. Training the healthcare workforce – a contractual commitment to training and the ability to deliver the standards and outcomes agreed and published by the profession.
2. Educating the healthcare workforce – a contractual commitment to provide appropriate education and continuing professional development opportunities for all health professionals.
3. Clinical audit – contractual agreements to ensure participation in clinical audit and publication of audit outcomes.
4. Research and development – contractual agreements to ensure participation in high quality research which is essential for advancing and improving patient care and outcomes.
5. Commissioning a complete service – ensuring the service includes arrangements for full emergency provision at the appropriate level to manage the follow-up of patients, including complications.
6. Measuring outcomes – outcomes to be measured coherently to enable comprehensive benchmarking across the NHS, with the data made available to the profession and used to inform practise and improve patient safety.

7. Appropriate impact on the local healthcare economy – when commissioning a service, a full assessment must be made of the impact of the decision on the patients’ pathway of care (i.e. ensuring that the patient will experience a seamless pathway across different providers) and the impact of the commissioning decision on related services (e.g. clinical interdependencies) in order to safeguard patients’ access. Such assessments should include a consideration of the best available evidence used to support the decisions.

The College further believes that in order to maintain these standards for quality, commissioners of healthcare should ensure providers are able to make sufficient time available in the form of Supporting Professional Activities (SPA) within the consultant contract to allow consultants wishing to be involved in training, education, audit, research etc to do so. By acting in this way commissioners will demonstrate a high degree of senior level commitment to all the elements of a clinician’s role which contribute significantly to an increasingly safe and high quality health service.

May 2011