Communications Committee February 25 2008

Bi-annual opinion polling headline results

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction

Every two years, HPC commissions independent research in order to evaluate the success of communications activities, and in order to gain feedback to plan future activities. In 2007, this research was undertaken by Ipsos Mori, and the scope included gaining feedback from registrants, health professionals, and stakeholders.

Overall, the feedback from the research is positive, further underlining that much of the communications work we do is appropriately targeted to the right channels, and also providing information that has contributed to the development of the draft communications workplan for 2008 – 2009, which is a separate paper for this committee meeting.

The section of the draft workplan 'Priorities and Issues for 2008 – 2009' deals with some of the feedback from this work, showing how various activities on the plan will contribute to meeting the needs or queries expressed by various health professionals, members of the public, or stakeholders.

In addition, appended to this paper is a document entitled 'Comments on opinion polling headline results'. This provides information about how the information provided is being taken forward, either through existing work, by other departments, or by next years Communications workplan.

Decision

This paper is for information only. No decision is required.

Background information

The research methodology comprised quantitative research among the general public, discussion groups among HPs (those registered with the HPC) and in-depth telephone interviews with stakeholders.

For research among HPC registrants, five discussion groups took place across the UK - in Leeds, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast and Bishop's Stortford. Registrants from across the 13 professions that the HPC regulates took part, with a mix of representatives from the different professions in each group. The discussion groups included a mix of NHS and private practise health professionals and gender.

Fourteen stakeholder interviews were conducted between 1st November and 4th December 2007. The HPC provided Ipsos MORI with named leads of stakeholders from which to conduct up to 20 interviews. The sample included a mix of the respondent types.

A standard topic guide, designed by Ipsos MORI, was used to direct the discussions. Copies of discussion guides used for the qualitative research are appended. The participants themselves dictated the general content and flow of the discussions, within the framework of the topics introduced by the moderators.

Further detail about the methodology, including discussion guides, will be available in the final report which will, as with other research undertaken by HPC, be published online.

Resource implications

Not applicable.

Financial implications

Not applicable.

Appendices

Ipsos Mori research Executive summary
Comments on opinion polling headline results

Date of paper

13 February 2008

Ipsos Mori Reseach

Executive Summary

General Public

Around one in seven UK residents say they have heard of the HPC, rising to one in five (20%) of those who have had contact with a HP in the last year.

The public's understanding of the role of a regulatory body like the HPC appears to be low. Thirty-two percent of the general public are unable to identify what the role of a regulator of health professionals might be at all. A similar proportion (31%) simply state that such a regulator would 'regulate health professionals', without having much idea of what that may involve.

Various factors contribute to the public having confidence in their health professionals. A health professional having good communication skills / explaining things well is more likely to contribute to the public having confidence in health professionals than the qualifications they have, or being registered with the HPC. It seems to be the *treatment* and *how it is delivered* rather than regulation or qualifications that inspire confidence in the general public.

If they had cause for concern about the skills or behaviour of a health professional, relatively few people would contact the HPC (six per cent), although this rises to 14% among those who have heard of the HPC. Around one in three UK residents (35%) say they would contact their local health authority. A further one in four (24%) say they would tell their HP's immediate line manager, and one in eight (12%) would contact the relevant professional body. One in fourteen (seven per cent) say they wouldn't know who to contact.

The majority of people who have used a HP have not had any cause for concern. Among those who have, a lack of cleanliness or poor hygiene, long waiting times and poor communication skills are the reasons cited most frequently, albeit only by around one in ten. In order to raise concerns about a HP, people are currently more likely to go to their local health authority or line manager than one of the professional bodies or a regulator.

Leaflets in GPs' surgeries are thought to be the best way for the HPC to communicate its role and services to the public. Many cite various forms of communication through the media, such as the internet, but there is no consensus about the best medium.

Looking across different groups of UK residents, a pattern emerges. Those in lower social grades, who do not own their own homes and those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely to use HPs, less likely to gain confidence in HPs as a result of regulation, and less likely to know who to complain to in order to raise concerns about a HP. In addition, they are less aware of the HPC. This is likely to be related, at least in part, to the younger age profile of these groups.

Health Professionals

The research found that attitudes towards the HPC among registrants are generally quite negative, but in the context of low awareness of how the HPC operates and its role and responsibilities. Many health professionals appear to be working in conditions where resources are tight and they feel that unreasonable demands are being placed on them from 'above'. In these circumstances, health professionals are sceptical about measures being introduced which they perceive as putting more demands on their time, and are nervous that change may have a negative impact on their jobs. As such, many see themselves as working to the best of their ability under difficult circumstances, whilst an organisation they know and understand very little about appears to be influencing the way they carry out their work.

A minority of health professionals have had contact with the HPC beyond registration, and as such, a great deal of confusion exists around what kind of organisation the HPC is. Very little is understood about how the HPC operates. In particular, very little is known in regard to how the HPC is involved in monitoring CPD and how the fitness to practise complaints process works.

Health professionals say they would like to be better informed by the HPC. In particular they would like a better understanding of whether they are getting 'value for money' – what is their registration fee paying for? Many would like guidance on CPD requirements and how to fulfil them, and most would benefit from knowing how the HPC impacts on their roles, and what it does to benefit them.

Stakeholders

In contrast with the general attitudes among registrants, the research found that attitudes towards the HPC among stakeholders are generally very positive. The stakeholders who took part in the research are familiar with the HPC and what it does and most stakeholders feel that they understand the objectives of the HPC at least fairly well.

Positively, the majority of stakeholders consider the Health Professions Council to be either *very* or *fairly* effective in protecting the well-being of the people using the services of the health professionals that they regulate. Added to this, many have confidence in the HPC's processes. The key achievement of the HPC, mentioned by several stakeholders, has been the establishment of common standards and a common approach amongst a diverse group of health professionals - something which stakeholders generally considered to be a challenge. Added to this, the HPC website was an area consistently praised by stakeholders.

Although the feedback from stakeholders was generally positive, many still see the HPC as a relatively new organisation that needs to continue evolving and making improvements in certain areas.

Many of the recommendations made by stakeholders centre around communication. Stakeholders consider that public knowledge and understanding of the HPC is very limited and raising public awareness of the organisation is

seen as an issue that needs to be a key focus of the HPC. Added to this, stakeholders perceive registrants' understanding of the HPC to be partial and so feel that the HPC should further communicate their work and the value of registration to Health Professionals.

Many stakeholders themselves would like more face-to-face contact with the HPC. The importance of creating a dialogue, whereby the HPC listens and acts upon recommendations rather than just providing information, was mentioned.

There is a perception amongst some stakeholders that the HPC is too distant from other regulators. A recommendation made by several stakeholders was that there needs to be more collaboration between regulators, especially given the changes that will occur to regulation in the future.

Stakeholders consider that the changes recommended in the White Paper *Trust, Assurance and Safety: The regulation of health professions in the 21st Century*, particularly revalidation, to be the most pressing issue facing health care regulators in the future. Added to this, the increase in the number of professions wanting to be registered was frequently mentioned as a challenge on the horizon for the HPC.

Executive Summary from Ipsos Mori

Health Professions Council – Public, Registrant & Stakeholder Views
Research Among Health Professionals, Stakeholders & the General Public

Comments on opinion-polling headline results

Members of the public

There is a small rise in the number of members of the public that report having heard of HPC. Although small, this is nevertheless an endorsement of our public-facing communications activities. It does highlight the ongoing importance of the public campaigns aspect of HPC's work, however, as does the finding that awareness of what regulatory bodies do is low.

The factors that contribute to public confidence in health professionals, and also the information about what, if anything has been a cause of concern, can be fed into the Professional Liaison Group working on the revalidation of health professionals. This is particularly important for our work since the government's proposals for revalidation were directly influenced by information showing that the public 'expected' revalidation to be in place.

Information about who members of the public would contact to complain highlights the importance of our stakeholder work, and also our work with referrers including GPs, Citizens Advice Bureaux, Community Health Councils, etc. There is a direct recommendation around work with GPs, which likewise further underlines the importance of this work.

The findings regarding different groups' of UK residents and their differing likelihood of using health professionals but also crucially of then having confidence in health professionals, or knowing who to complain to, underlines the importance of the 'hard-to-reach' campaigns. This will be a long-term communications aim, with no 'easy solutions' and there will be useful information to share and learn here with the Joint Regulators' Patient Public Involvement Forum.

Health Professionals

The key areas for work that emerge here are communicating requirements for CPD, and also more information for registrants about what HPC does.

The appointment of the CPD Communications Manager on a full-time secondment provides an opportunity to build on the CPD information we have already published. Raising awareness of the CPD guides, and the sample profiles, is key here. Further information about our CPD communications activities is available in a separate paper at this committee meeting.

Stakeholders

There are very positive messages in the feedback here about HPC's success in establishing multi-professional regulation, and some welcome positive feedback regarding the website. The view of HPC as still evolving and improving is consistent with the view of the organisation and the commitment to continuous improvement.

As detailed in the workplan, it is evident that public campaigns are very important to stakeholders' perceptions of how effectively HPC is working, and likewise that work with registrants is also important here.

The desire for more face-to-face contact, and creating a dialogue, can be taken up through the Public Affairs programme of meetings and contacts, and particularly by feeding interested parties into the various pieces of work undertaken by Policy and Standards, where individuals have indicated that they would like to participate in joint working. Similarly, there is an opportunity, through discussion with stakeholders, to raise awareness of the various pieces of cross-regulatory work that HPC is involved in.

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