

Welsh health conference a big success

ACCA Wales' annual health conference continues to grow in popularity, as this summer's event showed. Sharon Cannaby reports.

■ **The 2008 ACCA Wales Health Conference – held in Cardiff on 4 July – proved to be the most popular yet, revealing that the efforts ACCA is making to support its members in the NHS in Wales is paying off.**

Chaired by Stuart Davies, Acting Chief Executive – Health Commission Wales, the event attracted close to 100 delegates, with sessions covering: financial flows and commissioning, successful mergers, accounting standards, patient level costing, exam techniques and strategic leadership development.



(left to right): **Jeff Buggle** – Director of Resources, Health and Social Services, Welsh Assembly Government, **Stuart Davies** – Acting Chief Executive, Health Commission Wales, **Ben Cottam** – Head of ACCA Wales.

Jeff Buggle, Director of Resources Health & Social Services – Welsh Assembly Government, gave the opening address. A summary follows, while Jeff goes into more detail in his article on p14.

Jeff opened with an update on the financial position in Wales, revealing that Wales has seen year on year investment in health and that spend per head now stands at £1,741 (UK average £1,629). This compares favourably with the North East of England, an area

considered to be broadly similar in socio-economic terms.

Jeff said that the financial position in Wales has significantly improved on previous years and that there have been dramatic improvements in waiting times. Public perception of the health service in Wales has also improved and finance staff should be proud of what they have achieved.

The reorganisation of NHS Wales was obviously an area of key interest, and Jeff outlined his belief that this will bring opportunities for both individuals and organisations, whilst stressing that it brings risks which, as finance staff, we need to manage.

Looking to the future, Jeff focused on five key areas:

- **financial governance and leadership** – finance has to move from a culture of break even to one of surplus and that organisations needed to include contingency budgets in their opening plans so that they are better prepared to cope with the unexpected
- **financial planning** – finance has to make the move away from short term planning towards medium to long term planning (3-5 years) for capital, cash and balance sheet; not just I&E
- **finance for decision making** – using service line reporting / patient level costing will give everyone a better understanding of cost profiles and, in particular, will enable finance staff to engage in dialogues with clinicians
- **financial reporting** – Jeff asked if finance staff have moved with the times. He suggested looking back 15 years and comparing the data you presented then with the data you present today. If it has not changed, then you need to examine why. The world has changed significantly in the last 15 years – so should your methods of financial reporting.

Jeff closed by focusing on plans for the development of finance staff across Wales. In emphasising the need for all NHS finance staff to undertake continuous professional development he quoted Alvin Toffler: “The illiterate of the future are not those who cannot read or write but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.”

Professional exams are just the start. Finance staff also need to develop skills to help them properly understand, manage and lead the NHS. Jeff reiterated his commitment to finance staff development and announced that he is putting in place *A Development Framework for the Finance Profession of NHS Wales* which will help embed professional development in the organisational culture.

The one day conference provided an excellent opportunity for NHS finance staff to update their skills, network with colleagues and earn up to seven CPD points. If you work in the NHS in Wales why not join us in 2009? ■

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