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Patient enrolment the key to improved patient health – says expert

Patient enrolment has mobilised general practice to improve patient health care in the United Kingdom and could be considered as a platform for similar improvements in Australia, according to an international health expert.

Professor David Colin-Thome, OBE, National Director for Primary Care, United Kingdom Department of Health, said enrolment with General Practitioners (GPs) enabled GPs to follow patients' progress properly and measure improvements.

"Enrolment has enabled us to keep up to date on patient health outcomes. We can see where there have been improvements. And we have seen improvements, particularly in lower socio-economic groups, they are starting to reach the same health success as the richer parts of the country," he said.

The Australian Government is considering introducing voluntary patient enrolment with general practices as part of its consultation on reports by bodies such as the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC).

Professor Colin-Thome said the idea that patients are tied to one doctor, whom they might not like, by patient enrolment was 'not true'.

"Patient choice' is the catch cry of the NHS. Our system aims to give patients more choice, not less. Of course if patients want to change GPs they can. They can change specialist or seek a second opinion, all of that is enshrined in the system as much as I am sure it is in Australia," he said.

The United Kingdom introduced a Quality Outcomes Framework (QOF) in 2004 which set patient health indicator targets with performance payments attached.

GPs continue to meet these targets by more than 90 percent, even after recent QOF revisions made them tougher.

"GPs respond to targets, especially when they see that they make sense and encourage good practice models. As we found in the UK, as expected, many GPs were giving this kind of care anyway, but now they can prove it, and others can improve. GPs should be properly recognised and rewarded for the great job they do.

"Without patient enrolment that success would have been almost impossible to measure and I consider it fundamental to the better health outcomes our patients are seeing now," he said.

For media interviews please phone AGPN Communications Manager Frith Rayner on 02 6228 0819 or 0402 267 190