

'Custody healthcare transfer is no panacea'



Faculty of Forensic and Legal Medicine President warns of problems with process of making medical specialists responsible for health of detainees.

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By - [Josh Loeb - Police Oracle](#)

Concern has been aired by a respected forensic physician about the process of transferring custodial healthcare commissioning powers to the NHS.

Dr Jason Payne-James (pictured), President of the Royal College of Physicians' Faculty of Forensic and Legal Medicine, warned the transfer was "no panacea".

His comments came after politicians [called for greater transparency about why the process had apparently been beset by delays](#).

Dr Payne-James told delegates at the Forensic and Policing Services Association (FAPSA) conference in Cardiff that he had helped compile a Freedom of Information request to police forces to find out what provisions they have for medical services.

"This is particularly timely at the moment because the plan is that all police medical services, currently funded by each individual police force in England and Wales, are being transferred - supposedly in April 2016 - to the NHS," he said.

"That sounds like a great idea, but what's happening?"

"There is going to be top-slicing of funds. It is already degraded, running badly, with poor quality training.

"The standards are all there, but are they observed? No.

"It's a discussion for weeks and months to come, but it's not necessarily going to be the panacea that everyone says it is, and as the President of the Faculty of Forensic and Legal Medicine, it's one of my concerns."

'Benefits'

The bill for looking after the health of people detained in police custody cells and ensuring no harm comes to them is currently footed by individual police forces – but this is set to change early next year.

From April 2016 the NHS will be legally responsible for commissioning health services for those in custody - meaning it will also have to deal with the associated risks involved.

The recommendation that custodial healthcare commissioning responsibilities should be transferred from the police to the NHS was first made in a government review in 2009.

This review found there would be "clear benefits" from integrating the healthcare pathway across the criminal justice system.

Custody sergeants had expected the change to have been completed by the end of last year.

PoliceOracle.com understands that when this slipped, April 2015 was subsequently fixed by bosses as the desired deadline.

The deadline then slipped a second time, it is understood.

Earlier this year Lord Victor Adebawale, Chief Executive of charity Turning Point, told PoliceOracle.com he was concerned that such delays created a "higher the risk of stalling the momentum for change".

A spokeswoman for the NHS said this was a matter for the Department of Health, which could not provide any comment as this article went live.

However, professionals involved in the process have stressed that ensuring the best interests of detainees are protected is their highest priority.