The status of genetics services in health authority contracting in the United Kingdom

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We have undertaken a survey to assess the current status of genetic counselling services in health authority contracting throughout the United Kingdom. A one page questionnaire was sent to all 124 health authorities/boards in the UK. Respondents were asked to indicate their progress in developing a specification for genetic counselling services, and to indicate their approach to purchasing such services. The response rate was 84%. The survey found that 56.7% of those health authorities responding either have, or are in the process of developing service specifications. A further 6.7% intend to develop one, whereas 17.3% subsume specifications within other services. A minority (17.3%) have no plans at present to produce a specification. For contracting arrangements, 49.0% use a consortium approach, whereas 33.7% negotiate individually with the provider of services. Health authorities taking a consortium approach to commissioning appear more likely to have completed specifications (28.8%) than those negotiating individually with providers (9.6%). The majority of health authorities responding have therefore identified the need for a specification specifically for genetic services. The implications of this, and those of approaches to contracting are being further examined.

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