

Box 1: Examples of the importance of integrated care

Lack of communication between GPs and consultants

Communication between GPs and consultants are essential for the quality of care a patient receives throughout his journey. A GP describes: "I say to the patients when they come back 'what did the consultant say was the plan?' and they reply 'he didn't say what the plan is', 'so what's happening next?', 'He hasn't told me' so [...] consultants are not used to communicating at that level" (site B).

Lack of collaboration between GPs and between different consultants

A GP described the case where a woman had consistent bleeding every two weeks from her stomach. The woman had been receiving treatment from her cardiologist due to another heart issue. The gastroenterologists believed that the medication that she was under was the reason she was bleeding regularly. "Now it's just going round and round" and the patient is frustrated as the consultants do not appear to talk to each other: "textbook says she has to be on this drug for a year" and thus cardiologists insist she need to continue taking the treatment, thus, ignoring the side effects gastroenterologists believe the drug produces. "And she listens to them because they are consultants". There is a need to approach healthcare differently and "that's what's difficult to change" (site B).

Need for greater integration in healthcare networks

Another GP described the path of a particular senior citizen who lives on her own and her main problem is that she is a bit forgetful: "she doesn't know when to take her medication" and therefore needs someone to go and check on her. "Do we go down adult social care or is it a bit milder than that, and she needs a friend, a neighbour, and everyone starts to network into this system". The main concern is that the parties involved do not have the necessary information about the activities of the others: "A doesn't know what B is doing, left hand doesn't know what right hand is doing, Salvation Army doesn't know what is going on in the Alzheimer's Society who don't know what is going on with Age Concern" (site C).