

SPEAKING at the launch of “LIVING WITH LONG TERM CONDITIONS” Chief Medical Officer Dr Michael McBride said:

I am delighted to see the Policy Framework launched. The Framework is the culmination of a significant programme of work by the Department and many of you here today; and an excellent example of what can be achieved through working in partnership across sector boundaries.

I want to congratulate all those who were involved in the development process. In particular I want to pay tribute to the contribution made by the Long Term Conditions Alliance in Northern Ireland and the Patient and Client Council in ensuring that the voices and interests of service users were heard and, crucially, listened to.

The number of people with one or more Long Term Condition is increasing. GP registers show that in Northern Ireland 1 in 8 adults has high blood pressure; 1 in 17 has Asthma; and 1 in 20 has diabetes.

Chronic kidney disease, heart disease and thyroid problems are almost as common, with at least 1 in 30 adults having each of these.

These are the statistics; but behind every statistic is a person trying to live with a condition that has the potential to have a real and significant impact on their life and the lives of family and carers.

Having a long term condition can affect people's lives in different ways and to varying degrees. Common impacts can include physical functioning, including pain; mental health problems; social isolation or a sense of stigma; employment or employment potential and financial concerns.

If the effects of long term conditions on individuals and carers are significant, so too are the effects on our health and social care system both now and into the future.

In February 2010, the Institute of Public Health in Ireland published a report entitled “*Making Chronic Conditions Count*”. The report contains forecasts of the population prevalence for a number of long term conditions, namely: Diabetes, Hypertension, Stroke and Coronary Heart Disease.

Shockingly the report predicts that between 2007 and 2020 the prevalence of these long term conditions amongst adults in Northern Ireland is expected to increase by 30%. Given these projections and the pressures that will result on our health and social care services, we cannot afford to stand still. We must take action now to ensure that the potential demands on services are faced head on.

To do this we need to place a greater emphasis on prevention and public health. It is a known fact that individuals can reduce their risks of developing or exacerbating a long term condition by following healthy living advice - for example, if they can stop smoking, take regular exercise and move towards a healthy weight.

We also need to reshape health and social care policy and services to provide an appropriate framework to enable self management, pre-emptive care and greater support for people in the community, closer to home.

The health service take management of long term conditions seriously – In the GP contract out of 1,000 points that each GP practice can gain for Quality, over 2/3 are for clinical management of long term conditions

But there is much that can still be done to help people living with long term conditions, such as educating them about their condition and supporting them to manage it with confidence.

Supporting self management is a key tenet of this Policy Framework and also of the recent “Transforming Your Care” report which includes a series of proposals to support a new model of care for people with long term conditions. The NI Executive’s Programme for Government 2011-15 includes a commitment that people with chronic conditions who want to be enrolled on a dedicated condition management programme will have the opportunity to do so, providing people with the skills and knowledge needed to self care.

In future, for many people with long term conditions this will mean a new way of working with clinicians, HSC professionals and others; this will support the person to self manage for a lot of the time whilst providing timely intervention when exacerbations need more active clinical input.

This new model of care will also mean ensuring that health and social care professionals have the skills needed to support people at home.

The development of the Living with Long Term Conditions Policy Framework has been influenced by the service frameworks for respiratory health and wellbeing; cardiovascular health and wellbeing and cancer prevention, treatment and care. Service frameworks provide a series of standards which aim to ensure that health and social care services are safe, effective and patient centred.

Importantly, service frameworks also recognise the importance of information and self management as well as the need for carers’ involvement in the choices and decisions that are made by the person they care for.

There are many good initiatives in place throughout Northern Ireland to help people living with long term conditions. These can range from local Trust based programmes to large scale initiatives such as the introduction of the Remote Telemonitoring Project which, when it has been rolled out in full over the next six years, should have 20,000 people across Northern Ireland monitored from home.

I believe we can all benefit from sharing the experience and expertise that already exists in the statutory, independent, voluntary and community sectors and I would encourage all of us to do so and to build upon this.

As you have heard, Minister Poots has a clear vision for the modernisation of health and social care that will drive up the quality of care, improve patient outcomes and enhance the patient and service user experience. I believe the implementation of this Policy Framework will help achieve this.