

NHS England Board meeting

Paper Title: NHS Race and Health Observatory annual report

Agenda item: 7 (Public session)

Report by: Dr Habib Naqvi (Director, NHS Race and Health Observatory);
Dr Bola Owolabi (Director, Health Inequalities, NHSE)

Paper type: For information

Organisation Objective:

NHS Mandate from Government	<input type="checkbox"/>	Statutory item	<input type="checkbox"/>
NHS Long Term Plan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Governance	<input type="checkbox"/>
NHS People Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Executive summary:

In April 2021, the NHS established the NHS Race and Health Observatory, an independent body created to examine ethnic health inequalities in the NHS and to provide practical support to the NHS in eradicating those inequalities.

This paper provides an update after the organisations first year in operation, and the impact it has already had in this time.

Action required:

The Board is asked to note the contents of this report, recognising the achievements, alignment to national healthcare strategy, and the support the NHS Race and Health Observatory provides to the NHS and wider health system in tackling ethnic health inequalities.

Background

1. The NHS Race and Health Observatory (RHO) has been in operation since April 2021. The organisation was established with a remit to:
 - mobilise and produce evidence around ethnic health inequalities;
 - to use that information to create actionable policy recommendations for the NHS and other bodies in the sector, and;
 - to practically support the implementation of those recommendations by providing policy advice to national leaders, and resources for people working throughout the NHS.
2. The RHO has attracted a Board of internationally regarded experts in improving health outcomes and in the tackling of ethnic health inequalities. Chaired by Marie Gabriel, Board members include Professor Kevin Fenton, Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Lord Victor Adebawale, Lord Ajay Kakkar, Professor James

Nazaro, and Professor David Williams from the Harvard University. Led by Dr Habib Naqvi as Director, a team of skilled staff has also been brought together to deliver RHO programmes of work.

3. The RHO has established a stakeholder group representing affected communities to inform its work, an academic reference group and an international group to ensure efficacy, robustness, and best practice. In addition, the RHO convenes themed expert groups across mental health, maternal health, and digital and data.

Support to the NHS

4. Although the RHO is independent in terms of governance, it works closely with leaders across the NHS to ensure that its research output reflects the practical realities of policy and practice in the health service. Formally, this is managed through a contract between NHS England and the NHS Confederation, in which the RHO's priorities are directly mapped to the NHS Long Term Plan priorities.
5. As well as this direct contractual engagement, the RHO works closely with a number of policy teams across NHS England, including the Advancing Mental Health Equalities taskforce; the IAPT team; and teams across the improvement directorate, medical directorate, people directorate and the nursing directorate.
6. In addition, the RHO sits on key boards to support the NHS in its broader strategic ambitions, including the Inclusive Pharmacy Practice Advisory Board, Advancing Mental Health Equalities Taskforce, the Health Inequalities Programme Board, and the NHS Assembly. Following the Health and Care Bill receiving Royal Assent, the RHO is building on its work with leaders and engaging proactively to support NHS organisations, including a commitment of support to the 42 Integrated Care Boards.
7. The positioning of the RHO is crucial to its success. Being independent means the Observatory is an authoritative and impartial voice on issues of race equality in health and care. At the same time, its close relationship to policymakers at NHS England and at the Department of Health and Social Care means the Observatory's recommendations are compatible with the priorities and structure of the NHS.

Areas of focus, work and impact to date

8. Based on extensive stakeholder engagement, the RHO identified five core areas of initial focus – mental health, maternal and neonatal health, digital and data, genomics and precision medicine, and the health and care workforce. In addition, the RHO has remained responsive to emerging issues, including COVID-19.
9. In its first year of operation, the RHO has made significant progress, not just in terms of producing high quality research and insight for the benefit of the NHS, but also engaging with community stakeholders, and policymakers across the health and care landscape to support the implementation of practical recommendations.

10. RHO publications to date include:

- a. A rapid review into the accuracy of pulse oximeter readings from Black and minority ethnic people. This review led to updated clinical guidance from both NHS England and MHRA, and has led, in part, to the announcement by the Secretary of State of a broader independent review into racial bias in medical devices, and to a recent NIHR funding call for further research in this area, which will lead to better outcomes for all communities.
- b. A review into ethnicity coding in the English health service, including many actionable recommendations to improve data gathering and therefore our understanding of ethnic health inequalities in the NHS.
- c. A report produced in partnership with the King's Fund on the levers that can be pulled in the NHS to reduce ethnic health inequalities, including the role of leadership, with actionable recommendations for the NHS and the government.
- d. A consultation report on the use of collective terminology regarding ethnicity in the health and care policy space, which includes a set of principles around language that is now being adopted by other organisations.
- e. A rapid evidence review looking at the RHOs five core areas and outlining actions across research, policy, and practice,
- f. A focused research report commissioned on behalf of NHS England looking at the support needs of newly appointed board-level health inequality leads, including resources to support activity across the NHS.

10. Further achievements and ways in which the RHO has demonstrated impact include:

- The UK and US governments' bilateral agreement at the 2021 G7 Summit to twin the RHO with the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, has resulted in the establishment of a collaborative programme of work.
- providing supporting evidence during the development of the Core20PLUS5 programme, is actively supporting teams across NHS England, and inputting into the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities' upcoming health disparities white paper.
- delivering seminars with NHS leaders, health inequalities leads, practitioners, and community groups to share learning and best practice.
- playing a significant role in future-proofing advancements and innovations in tackling ethnic health inequalities, previously not addressed by the NHS – including collaborative work with the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR).

Ongoing work

11. The RHO also has several live programmes of work, all of which will serve to

support the NHS in delivering its Long Term Plan commitments, with further practical and tailored recommendations. These projects include:

- Analyses of the NHS backlog in elective care and routine appointments by ethnicity.
- A study of the impact of long COVID on the health and care workforce.
- A review into variation in sickle cell disease patient pathways (this work also features as a recommendation for the Observatory in the recent All Party Parliamentary Group report into sickle cell disease).
- An interactive digital platform designed to empower leaders, clinicians, academics and patients by presenting local population data on ethnicity as well as good practice resources.
- A review into ethnic inequalities in Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT).
- A mapping exercise looking at ethnic health inequalities in maternal and neonatal services.
- A review into diagnostic testing and practice in neonatal services (including the Apgar score).
- An evaluation of digital inclusion for minority ethnic groups across 3 major NHS apps.
- A review of the use of equality impact assessments in the deployment of innovative technologies in the NHS.
- A focus on ethnic health inequalities in genomic research and precision medicine, including research looking at the role of genomic testing in reducing potential harm in cancer drugs.
- A programme of work looking at ethnic diversity in medical research and education (with Health Education England), and elective placements for future leaders including medical students and GMTS students.
- Work to increase understanding of 'trust' as a potential wider determinant of health, to inform work focused on building confidence and improved relationships with communities.

12. In addition to the above areas of continuing work, the RHO's focus for the next 2 years will include:

- Increasing support to NHS leaders in taking action to tackle ethnic health inequalities. A key focus will be on working directly with ICSs to implement novel and innovative ways to tackle identified inequalities.
- Working with NHS England on the Long Term Plan update, focusing on how methods of implementation can further reduce ethnic health inequalities.
- Working with HEE and NHS England to address racial biases in the education and training of clinicians and other healthcare professions.
- Supporting the research sector to address ethnic health inequality bias through explore how medical research is funded and who is participating in that research.
- Expanding the role of diverse voices in the organisation by establishing a formal community engagement framework.
- Increasing the international focus, learning and profile of the RHO and its work to address inequalities.