

CQC's inspection programme of Defence Medical Services: Annual report for Year 6 (2022/ 23)

Introduction

This annual report sets out what we have found from our inspections of the quality of care in Defence Medical Services (DMS) for 2022/23.

The Defence Medical Services Regulator (DMSR) has continued to commission CQC to inspect health care and medical operational capabilities. The programme of inspections started in 2017/18 and this report covers Year 6.

Our inspections in support of the DMSR aim to:

- Highlight any problems that we find. We make recommendations as needed to ensure that military health services address issues for the benefit of patients – as well as the staff working in them.

Where we found concerns in the first years of the programme, we have carried out follow-up visits to ensure that services have delivered the necessary improvements. In rare cases, where we found poor and unsafe practice that put patients at risk, we escalated our concerns to DMSR who took regulatory action. We have found that almost all services have made improvements.

- Encourage improvement. Our inspection reports highlight exemplary practice to encourage other services to learn from it and adapt what is relevant to use in their own improvement journey. Across Defence Primary Healthcare, we have seen how sharing learning and best practice has improved the quality of care delivered to military patients and their families. Although some key areas still need to improve, most medical centres re-inspected in Year 6 demonstrated sufficient positive improvement to confirm they had improved the quality of care.

In Year 6, we expanded our approach to carry out DMSR-led assessments of a number of unique military healthcare services. DMSR also invited us to carry out 2 pilot reviews of headquarters, focusing on leadership.

DMSR continues to recognise the value of CQC's inspections and the resulting improvements to care. Both our organisations are committed to ensuring that armed forces personnel and their families can access the same high-quality care as the rest of society.

We would like to commend military and civilian personnel for their hard work and commitment to delivering high-quality, safe and effective care.