

To:
Early implementer health and wellbeing boards

13 April 2011

NHS MODERNISATION – LISTENING EXERCISE

I am writing to seek your views on the issues you face as the people playing a vital role in modernising the NHS and joining up health and social care.

My colleagues and I have been delighted by the energy and commitment you are showing in coming forward to take on your new responsibilities and improve the quality of care. Already over 90% of local authorities have come forward as early implementers for health and wellbeing boards with the aim of delivering a more joined-up service from the NHS and local councils in the future.

Last year, we received over 6,000 responses to our consultation documents. We fully took these into account, as reported in “Liberating the NHS: Legislative framework and next steps”. The consultation showed widespread support for the principles of the White Paper. During the subsequent passage of the Health and Social Care Bill, issues have continued to emerge, some requiring clarification of the Bill, and others concerning implementation. We continue to receive feedback from national and existing local organisations and we are listening to this. While we have received a lot of constructive feedback we have also heard debate on some of the implications of these detailed proposals.

We now have the opportunity to take advantage of a natural break in the passage of the Bill to pause, listen and engage with all those who want the NHS to succeed, and subsequently to bring forward amendments to improve the plans further in the normal way. All Bills get improved during their Parliamentary passage, and the Health and Social Care Bill will be no exception. For example, we have already amended the Bill to ensure that competition, where it applies, will be on quality, not on price. Where we can go further to clarify and improve the Government’s policy intentions, we will do so.

The early implementer health and wellbeing board network has only recently come into existence; your engagement with the policies in the Bill will particularly help us to improve it. This is a pause in the legislation. The principle of greater involvement of local government remains clear. As Sir David Nicholson, Chief Executive of the NHS and I have today reiterated, we need to continue to take reasonable steps to prepare for implementation and maintain momentum on the ground. Sir David Nicholson has today sent a letter out to all Chief Executives about managing the transition. You can read a copy of this letter online at

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Lettersandcirculars/Dearcolleagueletters/DH_126024

However, while we pause, listen, reflect and improve our plans, we are keen to hear from you, as the people responsible for leading changes at a local level.

We want to draw on your experience as implementation progresses, and we would like to hear any feedback you have about what is working well currently and what could be improved.

I am not asking for you to produce a formal submission and there is no obligation for you to respond. Instead, this is an opportunity for you to share your thoughts, and have your voice heard.

If you would like to respond, you can complete the online response form at <http://www.dh.gov.uk/healthandcare> by 13 May 2011. Here you will also be able to find information about some of the main areas of debate. We have signalled four key areas where we'd be particularly interested in your views:

- the role of choice and competition for improving quality
- how to ensure public accountability and patient involvement in the new system
- how new arrangements for education and training can support the modernisation process
- how advice from across a range of healthcare professions can improve patient care.

Whilst I am keen to hear from you on these issues, please do not limit yourselves to these themes. I would equally welcome views on anything else you consider to be important for making these changes a success – your responses will matter.

As you may already be aware, last week I announced a new NHS Future Forum, made up of colleagues like you working on the frontline and shaping the NHS for the future. This Forum will be tasked with listening to views and reporting to the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and me on its findings. Your responses will be a valuable input to this process.

I thank you in advance for taking the time to share your views and I wish you every success in your continued efforts to improve our NHS.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Lansley', written in a cursive style.

Andrew Lansley CBE
Secretary of State for Health