

From the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health



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De Melula,

NHS ENGLAND

I am grateful for our recent discussions and for your letter of 25 March. I am writing to confirm my support for the NHS Commissioning Board adopting the name "NHS England".

From April, the NHS Commissioning Board will be taking on a more prominent, public-facing role. We agree that the title NHS England will provide a clearer, less technical sense of its remit and enable it to connect more effectively with the public.

In line with this greater clarity, the Board will have a critical role in communicating effectively with the media, including being able to speak with authority on NHS performance against all aspects on the mandate. As you have stated, the adoption of the new name will reinforce the need for the NHS Commissioning Board to work closely with the Department of Health, and other arms length bodies.

We also agree that this change of name is exclusively about ensuring effective communications with the public. It does not signify any change in the status or power of the NHS Commissioning Board, or change of government policy.

In particular, we are in complete agreement that:

- NHS England remains fully committed to decentralising power to Clinical Commissioning Groups, as set out in the Mandate, and will continue to emphasise the local leadership and health and wellbeing boards in its actions and communications;

- NHS England is not responsible for the direct oversight of providers, other than through its commissioning powers. The NHS Trust Development Authority is responsible for oversight of NHS Trusts, and Monitor's functions will continue to include regulating NHS Foundation Trusts. The purchaser/provider split remains;
- The Care Quality Commission (CQC) will have an increasingly important and powerful role in the system in assessing the quality of providers, as set out in the Government's response to Francis Inquiry. To ensure alignment across the system, Monitor, the NHS Trust Development Authority, NHS England and the CQC are all committed to close and effective joint working; and
- It does not mean that NHS England will now become the headquarters of the NHS in England.

Of course, in adopting the new name, NHS England will continue to be directly accountable to government, including having responsibilities to maintain the principle of collective agreement, as well as to Parliament. In particular, I would expect to see progress on important mandate priorities, including supporting people with ongoing health problems to live healthily and independently; improving, where possible, the levels of performance in access to care; improving standards of care at the end of people's lives; supporting earlier diagnosis of illness, particularly through appropriate use of primary care; and making much more regular feedback on the friends and family test the norm.

As steward of the health and care system, the Department of Health will be publishing in the spring an updated account of the NHS Constitution Statement of Accountabilities, which will describe the respective roles and responsibilities of different organisations. I am grateful for your assurances that you will minimise any costs associated with the adoption of the name 'NHS England'.

It will be vital to get the messaging right on this issue. I have asked my communications team to work closely with yours to agree the timing and nature of any announcement.

JEREMY HUNT