

29 March 2012

Dear Colleague,

There are two things which matter to all of us in the NHS: to deliver high-quality care now, and to improve services in the future. I wanted to write, first, to thank you for your work over this last year, and to update you on how the NHS is performing.

The number of patients waiting over 18 weeks for treatment is at its lowest level ever. The number of patients being placed in mixed-sex accommodation has been reduced by 95% in just 14 months. MRSA and C-diff infections are at their lowest levels on record. Screening and childhood vaccination rates are up. Access to dentistry is improving. And as well as improving the quality of care, you have also delivered efficiency savings of over £8 billion, all of which is being reinvested in to frontline patient care. Patients are increasingly being seen in the right place, reducing emergency admissions.

You may be aware that the Health and Social Care Act has now passed into law. At its heart are two simple principles. Firstly, that patients should share in every decision about their care: “no decision about me, without me”; and secondly that those responsible for patient care – all of you – should have the freedom and powers to lead an NHS that delivers continually improving care for its patients.

In recent months, much has been written about this legislation, but I wanted to reassure you that the Act explicitly supports the core principles of the NHS: care provided free at the point of use, funded from general taxation, and based on need and not ability to pay. NHS organisations will still provide services to NHS patients. NHS staff will remain on NHS terms and conditions. NHS assets will remain publicly-owned.

The Health and Social Care Act will in reality empower NHS clinicians to determine the type of health services needed in their local area, using their clinical expertise and their knowledge to ensure NHS services meet the needs of patients. It will cut tiers of bureaucracy. It will promote integrated care, across health and social care. We will all have a duty to improve quality and to reduce health inequalities. Together with local government, the NHS will have the chance to lead stronger campaigns to promote better health and reduce smoking, obesity and alcohol and drug misuse. And from now on, the NHS will be judged on the results we actually deliver for patients, rather than on processes which have no clinical justification or benefit for patients.

I hope that the Health and Social Care Act will now give the NHS the long-term stability – in structure and in how it operates – that it has lacked. We are tackling the issues left to us. Putting that legislation in place is my job as a politician. My ambition is for a clinically-led NHS that delivers the best possible care for patients. But politicians should not be able to tell clinicians how to do their jobs. I hope you and your colleagues in the NHS will take advantage of the new freedoms that the Act has put in place.

I look forward to supporting leaders across the NHS who now take these opportunities to deliver the best outcomes for patients. I am grateful, as are the public, for the excellent performance of the NHS today. We will support you as you improve the NHS for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lansley CBE