



Public Health
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health



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Chief Executive

Friday message

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Dear everyone

Earlier this week I spent time in Geneva, first at the annual Commonwealth Health Ministers meeting, which focused on universal health coverage with an emphasis on ageing and good health, and then at the World Health Assembly, the supreme decision-making body for the World Health Organisation. At the Health Ministers meeting, they considered an analysis, initiated by PHE, of the global burden of disease across all 53 Commonwealth countries. This is important science, available to all member countries in informing their health care and public health planning. There was also support for our laboratory twinning work on antimicrobial resistance. The World Health Assembly's annual meeting brings together delegations from all 194 member states. The UK delegation was led by Jane Ellison, Minister for Public Health, and Chief Medical Officer, Dame Sally Davies. As well as contributing to the UK programme, we were able to catch up with our key partners. I met again with Minister Saira Afzal Tarar, the Pakistan State Minister for National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, to discuss our planned work with DFID and the government of Pakistan around building a national integrated infectious disease surveillance system. I also spent time with Dr Abu Bakar Fofanah, Minister of Health and Sanitation in Sierra Leone, and re-iterated our long-term commitment to supporting the building of his country's public health system in the aftermath of Ebola.

The scientific future for PHE is incredibly exciting and recently a number of our team presented to Sir Mark Walport, the Government Chief Scientist, about the opportunities of the "big data" revolution. This is relevant to all our work, including obesity, surveillance, cancer and infectious disease. For example, in infectious disease, the links between the new technologies that enable our teams to sequence the genome of infectious organisms, with the "big data" techniques of analysing and presenting large volumes of data to support decision-making, are at the very heart of our new National Infection Service (NIS) that goes live from 1 June. Professor Derrick Crook has joined us from Oxford University as the Director of NIS and the detailed design work which will bring together our epidemiologists, microbiologists, bio-informaticians, laboratory scientists and others in creating a world-leading "end to end" infections service has started.

On Wednesday the Boards of PHE and NHS England got together to review the role prevention can play in keeping people healthy and reducing demand for NHS care. We looked at how services such as the Diabetes Prevention Programme can refocus the NHS and reduce the incidence of disease and the much wider response needed of all of us in tackling child and adult obesity, including the action government, local government, the NHS itself, industry and people themselves can take. Importantly we also focused on workplace health. We need to do a better job of promoting the health of our own staff. It is the right thing to do, it improves quality, safety and productivity and the opportunity is to get all employers, big and small, private and public, to take this seriously. Both boards are aligned on prevention and ambitious in taking practical action that both improves outcomes and saves money.

And finally, I wish everyone a peaceful Bank Holiday break. As it is also school holidays next week my next Friday message will be on 5 June.

With best wishes