



Public Health
England



Duncan Selbie
Chief Executive

Friday message

Friday 24 May 2013

Dear everyone

Public health professionals are specifically trained to help NHS commissioners and local government make decisions on the best information available. GPs know about their practice populations and hospitals know about what comes through their door and what is in front of them, but the only people trained in population health are public health professionals. With the strengthening of their role both within local government and within PHE, it is their unique responsibility to help the whole system manage better on less. This is about choices. What they say to me on my travels is that the most important elements in the mix are leadership and culture. The characteristics of a good leader are the characteristics of a decent human being – someone who cares about and can inspire others; someone who smiles; someone who keeps their promises and treats people well even when things get tough. Sure there is a harder edge to getting great results – an ability to understand the big picture while having a grasp of detail, a relentless focus on the few outcomes that are really important and the courage to be clear with people and help them when they are not performing well. It is all ultimately about people and local relationships. The most important leadership responsibilities within the public health system now rest with the Directors of Public Health in local government. They are the head of profession for the local authority, but crucially working with and through the entire corporate team – the directors of children's services, adult social services, housing, environmental health, job creation, local regeneration are all part of the wider health team. This is why our public health professionals need the best training and development opportunities and the recent publication of the [Public Health Workforce Strategy](#) is hopefully an important moment in raising the bar. Working with our partners, PHE will lead in supporting and developing the specialist public health workforce, including Directors of Public Health, and in building public health capacity in the wider workforce.

We welcome the news that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence is developing for the first time [public health quality standards](#) as they have for healthcare for some years now. The first three will concentrate on tobacco, alcohol and obesity and we look forward to working with them on these and in particular drawing out the evidence about what works and the balance between individual responsibility and actions to improve population health.

And finally, on Wednesday – in the teeth of the cold and the rain – we published the [Heatwave Plan for England 2013](#) which we have co-produced with NHS England, the Department of Health, the Met Office, the Local Government Association, and other partners. This gives the frontline time to plan for summer when it finally does arrive. The toll taken by extremes of heat (and cold), particularly on the elderly, the young and those with serious illnesses can be considerable – there is extensive evidence that exposure to extreme heat kills, with most cases of illness and death caused by heart and lung disease – and the plan sets out for everyone how to reduce the harm severe heat can cause.

With best wishes