



## Friday message

Friday 27 June 2014

### Dear everyone

This has been a good week for the public's health. Yesterday, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) published its draft [report](#) on *Carbohydrates on Health* and we published our [paper](#), *Sugar Reduction: Responding to the Challenge*, which aims to kick start the debate on sugar reduction. Most of us, particularly children, eat too much sugar and we pile on the pounds to the detriment of our health, with one in three children starting secondary school and more than two thirds of adults being overweight. This increases the likelihood of us developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and breast and colon cancers – all of which can kill. So the ever-expanding bottom line is that as a nation we need to do something about reducing our sugar consumption and improve our diet. Of course, tackling overweight and obesity is not just about reducing sugar, important though that is, it is about a wide range of actions, from moving more and being more active to making healthy choices, for example, in our diet and our relationship with alcohol. To tip the scales in the right direction, action will be needed at national, local, family and individual level and retail and industry have an important part to play in this too. Our aim is to get the conversation going, and through this develop practical advice for Ministers and the public. We must be bold and ambitious but, crucially, bring the public with us too.

Another milestone, warmly welcomed, is the Government's announcement yesterday of its [consultation](#) on tobacco packaging. In responding, we will build on our original [submission](#) to the Chantler review. We encourage all with an interest in the public's health to take part.

The NHS Health Check Programme continues to attract attention from critics who seem intent on missing the point. Sadly, the recent BMJ editorial on the subject goes way beyond the evidence presented in drawing its conclusions and we felt the need to [respond](#). A massive effort by local government has seen the programme make excellent progress in their first year of being responsible in eventually offering 15 million people in England an assessment of their cardiovascular and other risks, followed by a range of preventive interventions of proven effectiveness. A recently published trial confirmed that a health check with low intensity lifestyle advice does not result in noticeable changes in population outcomes after ten years. Although not surprised by this result, we will use this opportunity to reflect on the overall approach to health checks. Models suggest that the programme could be more cost effective if directed at higher risk patients, but that would inevitably mean fewer cases were detected overall. Currently we favour the population approach, as described by Geoffrey Rose the guru of preventive medicine, but we will keep an open mind and a sharp eye on the data.

On Tuesday we contributed to the launch of the Public Health System Group Stakeholder Forum, chaired by Councillor Jonathan McShane, from Hackney. We very much hope that the links and networking opportunities created through the Forum will prove a powerful force for collective learning and action.

And finally, the Royal Society for Public Health has launched a new Public Health Minister's [Award](#) to recognise teams or organisations who have demonstrated excellence and innovation in improving the health of their staff. Applications are encouraged from organisations of all types and in any sector and the deadline for entry is 18 July. Could this be you?

With best wishes