



Public Health
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health



Duncan Selbie
Chief Executive

Friday message

Friday 6 February 2015

Dear everyone

I have been continuing to visit councils and their CCG partners across the country and recently this has included Birmingham, North Somerset, Greenwich, Lewisham, Wokingham, Wolverhampton and Bracknell Forest, and many points in between. I see lots of innovation and lots of problems that some might say are intractable but which local politicians, clinicians and managers are getting on with addressing. They cannot do everything so they have to prioritise and they can't solve everything on their own but they are the natural leaders for making things happen. For example, that is exactly what they are doing in Wolverhampton where their population experiences a number of health problems and none more compelling than obesity. With 40 per cent of their 11 year olds being overweight or obese, as are more than three quarters of all adults, the City council is tackling this as a whole city priority. Led by Ros Jervis, their Director of Public Health, everyone across the city is getting involved including the Acute Trust and the CCG. I was met at the station by three councillors, two of whom had between them lost a number of stones and they have all been sharing their experiences with their communities through tweets and blogging. They are not just 'warning and informing', they are actually leading from the front and they are determined to turn things around.

Many of you will have seen reports this week that one in two of us can now expect to develop cancer. As scary statistics go this is a big one. The good news is that this is largely because we are no longer as likely to die early, including from cancer. It is an opportunity to reflect on the contribution we in PHE make to the prevention and treatment of cancer. We deliver a superb information base on cancer through our disease registration and intelligence functions, supporting commissioners, clinicians and patients every day to improve cancer service quality and outcomes. We are currently running another campaign on early diagnosis, have helped deliver exceptional coverage in the vaccination programme to prevent cervical cancer, and continue to break new ground in our prevention work on the risk factors that cause cancer – not least on smoking and through our screening programmes. We also support world class research on cancer with our data and have recently produced hard hitting reports on inequalities in cancer outcomes by age and by deprivation. Much of this work was acknowledged in the recent National Audit Office report and subsequent Public Accounts Committee hearing on cancer services and outcomes where we also gave evidence. We are also involved in the refresh of the national cancer plan for the next five years. There is no doubt that cancer remains an emotive and important concern for the public and this will remain a very significant priority for us.

Not many may know that PHE at Porton develops and manufactures new vaccines and medicines. The most well known of these medicines is Erwinase[®], which is used to treat the commonest form of childhood cancer – acute lymphoblastic leukaemia. Our vaccines and medicines are distributed worldwide and are subject to regulation by the UK Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency and the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Three senior FDA investigators spent ten days on site in early January and reviewed all the Erwinase[®] processes, testing systems and facilities. This was intense scrutiny, placing significant pressure on staff who continued to manufacture throughout without disruption to the day job. The FDA were very complimentary about the skills and expertise of our staff and of our processes. I congratulate the team in having the quality of their work so effectively endorsed.

With best wishes