

1 October 2002

Dear David

STAFFING/RESOURCES FOR PATIENTS FORUMS

I thought I should let you know that we are picking up very worrying indications that the lack of staff and resources allocated to Patients' Forums may end up being far less than is necessary to enable them to function properly. The attached letter from the Chief Nursing Officer, Sarah Mullally to Chief Executive of Strategic Health Authorities indicates that the Department are contemplating somewhere in the region of 600 staff being available to Patients' Forums. A document produced by the Department at the end of July, looking at the IT requirements of the new system, envisaged "700 staff working from 28 local offices", whilst Ms Mullally actually says "over 600" staff. It is extremely worrying that the government are contemplating replacing CHCs with such an under-resourced system. For example:

- There are currently 184 CHCs for England, with over 700 staff
- There will be 600 Patients' Forums
- The responsibilities of Patients' Forums and the expectations of them will be far greater than with CHCs.

For your information, I enclose a discussion paper I have produced which tries to establish the number of staff that will be required to enable Patients' Forums to carry out their various functions. This indicates that way in excess of the 700 staff currently employed by CHCs will be required. Ministers declined to give any indication as to the ~~XXXXXX~~ of numbers of staff that would be made available played a significant role in persuading those concerned about the abolition of CHCs to accept the compromise that was on offer. Many would feel that to abolish CHCs whilst not adequately resolving their replacements would be against the spirit of what was agreed, or even that Parliament may have been muted.

I would welcome your comments on these issues, and anything you can do to try to ensure that Patients' Forums are adequately resourced.

With best wishes

Peter Walsh
Director