

2003/0043

Friday 31st January 2003

COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS TO BE ABOLISHED - LAMMY

Community Health Councils will be abolished on September 1st 2003, heralding a new era in patient and public involvement in the NHS, Health Minister David Lammy announced today.

The abolition of CHCs was announced in the NHS Plan. Today's announcement makes clear the Government's timetable to deliver this.

The functions of CHCs have been supplemented since January 1st by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health. In addition there is a new duty on the NHS to involve and consult the public and Overview and Scrutiny Committees have new powers to scrutinise health. These new developments along with the Patients Forums, which will be established over the coming months, will replace CHCs.

Mr Lammy said:

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff and members of CHCs for their valuable contribution over the years, as they undoubtedly have achieved a great deal.

"We are abolishing CHCs and establishing Patients' Forums with the support of the new Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health. The Commission promotes and champions the involvement of the public in decisions to ensure their voices are supported, encouraged and, where necessary, enforced.

"The NHS belongs to the public. The creation of the Commission signals a key shift in the balance of power in the NHS, ensuring national standards are controlled locally, giving the public real influence and power to modernise their NHS.

"The NHS now has a new duty to consult and involve patients and the public. Patient Advice and Liaison Services are being rolled out across the country to ensure patients and the public can resolve concerns about any aspect of their NHS care as quickly as possible.

"I hope that the skills, experience and knowledge of CHC staff and members will be retained in the wider NHS. I am pleased that we have been able to work closely with trade unions and NHS employers in developing a framework for supporting staff during this abolition period and would like to thank them for their contributions.

"We have been working with the Commission and are confident that they will be in a position to deliver an inclusive and effective patient and public involvement system.

"The Commission will be making their own statement later today."

To modernise public involvement in health and get as many people involved as possible the

Commission will:

- empower the public to have their say by training them with the skills they need to get involved;
- encourage Patients' Forums to use modern approaches to meetings to generate as much interest as possible; and
- ensure consultation is accessible for as many people as possible

Sharon Grant, Chair of the CPPIH said:

"The CHC movement has for 29 years been the patient's friend and advocate, and we must pay tribute to the dedicated staff and lay members who have served the public for so long. Over the years, CHCs have been an important means of expressing the commitment of thousands of volunteer members to the NHS and their communities.

"The CPPIH is without doubt a product of the CHC movement. They proved how important public involvement in the NHS. Now for the first time, we now have a national voice for the public in health, with a broad remit and real teeth."

Harry Cayton, Director for Patient Experience and Public Involvement said:

"For the first time patients and carers and families will have a real say in how their local health service is run. The new structures will help with our aim of a truly patient centred NHS."

Colenzo Jarrett-Thorpe of AMICUS MSF said:

"AMICUS acknowledges the important announcement of an abolition date for CHCs. We are determined to work with the Department of Health and the Commission to ensure our members are influential and supported in creating new patient and public involvement to serve the nation."

Commenting on the Human Resources Framework document Phil Green of UNISON said:

"It has been a long hard road to reaching agreement on the HR framework but we value the partnership approach taken by the DoH,

"The issuing of this document is only the beginning of the end, the same partnership approach will have to be replicated at a local level.

"At last our members have had the uncertainty of the abolition date resolved. We now have to ensure that their future employment position can also be resolved satisfactorily and I am sure that this document will set the basis for that."

Notes to Editors

1. CHCs will work in partnership with the new Overview and Scrutiny Committees on the scrutiny of health until September 1st 2003.
2. The NHS now has a new duty to consult and involve patients and the public following the implementation of Section 11 of the Health and Social Care legislation on January 1st.
3. Media enquiries only, Malcolm Fawcett, DoH Media Centre. Tel: 020 7210 4984, email: malcolm.fawcett@doh.gsi.gov.uk