



ASSOCIATION · OF

COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS

FOR · ENGLAND · & · WALES

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PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

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NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE AND COMMUNITY CARE BILL

HOUSE OF LORDS: COMMITTEE STAGE

Amendment in name of Lord Young of Darlington

After Clause 20, add:

"Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Health

There shall be established a body known as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Health whose duty it shall be to monitor and report annually to parliament on the quality of the health and community care services provided for patients and consumers in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors."

The Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales, like many other organisations, has expressed concern that the overall effect of the Bill will be to promote cost containment at the expense of high quality service.

The argument runs like this. Hospital or service managers (the 'providers') will want to win contracts and to do this they will have to cut costs. This may well mean that quality standards may decline. Similarly, those purchasing services (the 'acquirers' - usually DHAs or fund-holding practices) will be operating with a fixed budget and will be seeking the most economical contracts.

This amendment would ensure that there would be an Inspectorate with the job of monitoring service quality across sectors with a view to ensuring that high quality standards are maintained. This Association would welcome this as being an important safeguard to protect the quality of patient services with two provisos.

First, it is important to ensure that any inspectorate is not dominated wholly by professional interests. There must be a substantial lay input. Second, the Inspectorate would need to have links at local level with the Community Health Councils, the patients' watchdogs in each District. CHCs have had fifteen years' experience of monitoring and commenting on service quality from the service users' perspective and it is important that their input is felt in the formal inspection process.

This briefing is prepared by the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales (ACHCEW). ACHCEW was set up in 1977 to represent the consumer of health services at national level and to provide a forum for member CHCs. 196 CHCs out of the 215 CHCs in England and Wales are members of the Association. ACHCEW is mainly funded by subscriptions from individual CHCs, but also receives grants from the Department of Health and a number of other bodies.

