



ASSOCIATION OF  
**COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS**  
FOR ENGLAND & WALES

The Right Honourable Frank Dobson MP,  
Secretary of State for Health,  
Richmond House,  
79 Whitehall,  
London, SW1A 2NS.

10 February, 1998

Dear Frank,

Thank you for your letter of 30 January 1998, concerning the recent ACHCEW initiative on monitoring accident and emergency services.

The Nationwide Casualty Watch exercise and your comments on it were considered by the Association's Standing Committee last week.

The Committee are sorry that you felt the exercise was seriously flawed. As you will be aware, we have always made it clear that the data collated was to have been collected by CHC volunteers asking for information from the nurse in charge. Inevitably, there are likely to be some problems with data collected in this way. However, in the absence of anybody else doing this and publicising the results, the approach taken is all that is realistically possible.

Our objective in this exercise was to establish the degree of pressure accident and emergency departments were under across the country. At any one time, there will be some departments who for fortuitous reasons are under particular stress. This is understandable, but does not alter the fact that patients who wait unacceptable periods as a result of, say, a diarrhoea outbreak still wait an unacceptable period.

No-one is suggesting that the cases listed were typical and, of course, most patients received a prompt and a high standard of care. We acknowledged in all our statements the initiatives taken by the Government to minimise problems this year and are pleased that they have been as successful as they have. (Incidentally, we are aware that some accident and emergency departments seem to have put in place special arrangements for the afternoon of the Nationwide Casualty Watch and, of course, these will also have had an effect on the figures.)

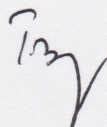
The Standing Committee takes the view that it is the responsibility of CHCs to monitor what is happening with services and report accordingly. The



Committee therefore agreed to repeat the national exercise in January 1999 when further improvements in performance will hopefully be seen. In addition, regional groups of CHCs are being encouraged to run regional casualty watch exercises on a more frequent basis. The Association will also be looking at how the current exercise went and will be seeking to strengthen the methodology and guidance issued so as to minimise any future arguments about the information produced.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Toby', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**TOBY HARRIS,**  
**Director.**