

January 31, 2003

'Shock and dismay' greet announcement on new Patient and Public involvement system

Community Health Councils (CHCs) have reacted with shock and dismay to today's announcement of their abolition date and the arrangements for the new structures that are to replace them. The Association of Community Health Councils for England & Wales (ACHCEW) argues that the new system will be massively underfunded; that there will be no effective overlap with CHCs, thus leaving Patients and the Public without adequate representation and support from Sept 2003 to April 2004; and that the government has abandoned its commitment to having a one-stop-shop in every community to assist people with complaints, to provide general information on patients rights, and to help them get involved in patient representation.

Malcolm Alexander, ACHCEW Director, commented:

"This is the worst possible news. There will be thousands of people across the country who are extremely angry and disappointed today. The whole system is going to be enormously underfunded. There is to be no effective overlap with CHCs, thus leaving patients and the public without proper representation for six months. And, perhaps worst of all, it appears that the government have reneged on their commitment to have an independent one-stop-shop in the community that you can turn to if you have a problem with your local health service.

"It would be disastrous to create a situation, in which if you have a problem with your local NHS the people who you have to see in the first instance are employed by the same Trust you may be making a complaint against."

"We welcome the hard work done by the new Commission, but clearly it can only work within the funding it has been given. The blame for this lies squarely with the government."

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