

The Rt Hon David Cameron MP
The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA



May 2011

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing in response to the 'Listening Exercise' on the future of the NHS. The voluntary and community sector (VCS) already operates extensively within health and social care and is known for its innovative, responsive approaches, meeting needs often not met by the statutory sector. It provides around £3.39 billion a year of health services, but its contribution is much more extensive. It is a source of expertise and support, often focused on preventative and wellness support. It leads the way in patient centred-services as well as tackling the wider causes of user ill health. While some organisations are large, many are small, community based groups that have emerged in response to local need.

NCVO has recently undertaken joint work with the King's Fund as well as undertaking consultation with our own members. This has informed our response to the listening exercise, which is enclosed. In particular I would like to outline three key issues that have emerged which, if addressed, will create a more local and patient centred NHS that will be both stronger and better value for money.

Firstly we feel that GP consortia need to be linked more closely to Local Health and Wellbeing Boards and Local HealthWatch. These two bodies are the main ways by which local communities and the local voluntary sector influence GP consortia. However at present there places no real obligation on GP consortia to listen to what they say, and evidence beginning to emerge that some pathfinder consortia are not naturally doing so. Therefore there needs to be robust mechanisms in place that ensure that consortia take on board the recommendations of these bodies.

Secondly there is a danger that larger providers could end up dominating the market, undermining one of the main aims of the Bill. 'Market shaping' has become increasingly recognised as an important part of a Commissioner's role and one that can have a large impact on the quality of markets. Therefore GP consortia need to have a remit which includes helping new organisations to become service providers, ensuring there is a diverse market in their area, and encouraging innovation.

Lastly, we believe Monitor should not just promote competition, but also collaboration. Collaboration between organisations has been increasing across public services in recent years, particularly in health where individual service users can have multiple needs. It has been instrumental in moving to more joined-up, patient centred services. This bill will create a more fragmented market place and therefore ensuring collaboration will become even more important.

We look forward to seeing the outcomes of the listening exercise and if you require further information or clarification of any of the points raised I would be happy to discuss them.

Yours faithfully

Sir Stuart Etherington
Chief Executive

Cc Deputy Prime Minister, Secretary of State for Health