

30 January 2006

Dear Colleagues,

Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services

You will be aware that [today] I have published our White Paper *Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services*. This represents a lasting and ambitious vision to address the major challenge we all face – promoting and maintaining health and well-being for all our citizens.

Access to high quality primary healthcare has a vital role in helping people to live longer and healthier lives. As a result of your hard work and dedication, and that of all staff in primary care practice, primary care is delivering quality services and public satisfaction with the services they receive in primary care is generally high. However, there is variation across the country, in access, in responding to the needs of the local community and in the level of provision in certain areas.

This White Paper looks to address these issues and to move forward by building on the strengths of what we have. List based general practice is and will remain the cornerstone of the NHS. Primary care is first point of contact for people to the health and wider services, and the continuity of care that you provide, through the registration system, is crucial. What we want to do is put people in control.

We will be taking positive action in a number of areas – in clarifying the rules on open and closed lists, in making it easier for responsive practices to expand and by giving the public a greater say in what they want from primary care in terms of access, services and increased co-operation with other agencies and services. We will also work to shift care into the community, where safe and effective to do so.

Many of you have contributed to the consultations, and that engagement has been very helpful as we have developed our thinking. This White Paper sets out the next steps for the whole spectrum on community services. I hope that you and your colleagues will read this White Paper and that you will continue to work with us to rise to the challenge before us all.

PATRICIA HEWITT