

# National Association of Patients' Forums

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October 18<sup>th</sup> 2007

Dear Baroness Andrews,

## Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill

We are very pleased that a number of important changes have been made to the Bill during the Report stage on October 16<sup>th</sup>, but we remain concerned that there are still serious shortcomings in the Bill, which are likely to produce weak and ineffectual LINKs. We believe that the key weaknesses of the Bill are its failure to describe the functions and powers of LINKs and the failure to provide for any membership.

We are writing to ask you particularly to consider the following issues in the few days before the Third Reading of the Bill, because as it stands the Bill will substantially reduce the capacity of patients and the public to exercise genuine influence over health and social care.

- 1) LINKs need to have a formal membership if they are to succeed. If they do not we believe they will be weak, vague and amorphous bodies.
- 2) LINKs must have powers. As the Bill stands all the powers rest with the bodies which are to be monitored. This approach will disempower LINKs' members.

- 3) The Bill creates potential for serious conflicts of interest, particularly in the case of a Host, which is also a voluntary sector local service provider. We are also concerned that the Bill allows an NHS body to become a Host and that this would wholly undermine public confidence in LINKs.
- 4) Some health and social care services and all privately run NHS services are excluded from monitoring by LINKs through this Bill.
- 5) The Bill doesn't allow for effective transition between Forums and LINKs - Abolition date is March 31<sup>st</sup> 2008, well before LINKs will be established in most areas.
- 6) LINKs will be very poorly funded. The current level of funding proposed will not be adequate to run a large and effective LINKs organisation.

The Bill has no requirement to pay member's expenses and no financial loss allowance and places the cost of member's indemnity on the shoulders of the Host which will place a considerable financial burden on them.

Although some Local Authorities have used the £10,000 provided by the Government to initiate useful local activities, the problem in many parts of the country is that commissioning of Hosts will be carried out quite late in the year or in the new year, because the Government funding announcement will be in November and because of the requirement to advertise in the European Journal in some cases. In practice this does not give the voluntary sector enough time to prepare and to be ready in time to establish LINKs from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2007.

The explicit wider community aspects of LINKs are vital if they are to have advantages over Forums. This will require sufficient resources to run organisations of hundreds or thousand of people, but it is clear that the amount of money currently on offer will be grossly inadequate (as little as £70-80,000 per LINK), because once administration costs for local authorities, training and national/regional costs are deducted, the amount of money for front line activities will be inadequate to fund a significant level of activity in relation to commissioning and monitoring of services.

We trust that you will consider these matters in detail before the Lords' Third Reading and we would be happy to discuss these points with you in more detail.

Yours sincerely

Members of the Steering Committee

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