

(received 19 October '07)

Surrey Patients' Forum



Mr P Ainsworth
House of Commons
WESTMINSTER
London
SW1A 0AA

17 October 2007

Dear Peter

The Abolition of Patient Forums The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill

As you know this Bill is soon to leave the Lords and will be back in the Commons for ratification. I am writing about the sections relating to the abolition of the statutory NHS Patient Forums and their replacement by something called LINKs.

LINKs need not have a fixed membership, "participants" will not have statutory powers as such, the Bill excludes monitoring of some social care services, and there are no provisions dealing with possible conflicts of interests. In short the Bill does not set out adequate functions and powers for the new bodies. How local authorities in practice structure them will inevitably depend on the level of Government funding, and this is totally inadequate for what they may be asked to do. As to encouraging volunteers to get the new system off the ground, there is no requirement to pay expenses or financial loss allowance.

I know the Conservative Party has severe reservations about these provisions. Having a very strong patient and public involvement at the local level is all the more vital in a period of very rapid change in the NHS, as the recent scandal in Kent, and the problems with implementing the new dentistry contract, illustrate.

As things stand the Forums, now in their stride, will cease on 1 April 2007; there is highly likely to be a gap before LINKs can be set up due to EU legislation; disillusioned volunteers will leach away; and when the LINKs are in place they may well be less than effective and will be under-resourced.

*K:\msn-07\10\10\07\SURREY PATIENTS' FORUM (RECONFIG)\Oct 17 TC from LR to his MP re LINKs.doc

All correspondence should be addressed via our Forum Support Organisation:

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The Select Committee of the House of Commons sensibly recommended a trial to assess the practical requirements for running LINKs, but this has not been taken up. Additionally, Lord Darzi is charged with carrying out a comprehensive review of the NHS for the Government within the year, yet this ill designed scheme will be going ahead, so pre-empting anything he might say.

Is it too late for Conservative front-benchers to seek talks with Ministers (including Lord Darzi) with a view to delaying implementation until greater certainty can be reached as to how to make LINKs a success?

In the meantime I am sure current Forum volunteers are ready and willing to carry on their duties on the basis of carefully built up processes with their local health authorities.

I would be grateful if you could raise this with your colleague Ministers: it is urgent and of great importance to the development of the Health and Social Care services.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely



Pp Len Roberts
East Surrey Patient and Public Involvement Forum Member

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