

Press Release March 31<sup>st</sup> 2009

## **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of LINKs MEMBERS (NALM)**

**Patient & Public Involvement in Health & Social Care**

### **GOVERNMENT WON'T TAKE THE TEMPERATURE OF ITS NEWBORN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE WATCHDOG**

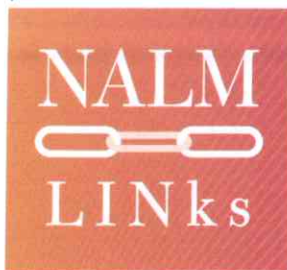
Health Ministers have decided to miss the first check-up appointment of the launch and national meeting of their own 'health and social care' watchdog organisations, which they created only one year ago.

The fledgling NHS and Social Care watchdog organisations, which the Government dubbed 'LINKs', (Local Involvement Networks), have special legal powers to monitor and inspect health and social care services and hold them to account. LINKs have an overall national budget of £28million, and their members are stunned at the apparent snub to their inaugural Conference in London on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2009.

Up to 150 LINKs' representatives from across England will converge on London for their newly-formed National Association of LINKs Members' (NALM) first conference. Invitations were extended to the Secretary of State for Health, Alan Johnson, and his ministerial team at the Department of Health.

But despite the new LINKs bodies desperately trying to get off the ground, as the only way the general public can fully and freely involve themselves in monitoring and checking on their NHS and Social Services Departments across the country, the Government has chosen to ignore this first NALM Meeting.

Malcolm Alexander, Chair, 30 Portland Rise, N4 2PP  
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QUOTE: Malcolm Alexander - "This would have been an ideal chance for the Government to take the temperature of LINKs, and assess our condition - it looks like we've been left in the cold on a trolley in the corridors of power," said LINKs' founding national organiser, Malcolm Alexander.

Nevertheless, NALM will be launched on April 2<sup>nd</sup> by Sir Cyril Chantler, Chair of the King's Fund NHS think tank and former Chair of Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital. Baroness Young, Chair of the new Care Quality Commission, has also confirmed she will attend.

"The conference will build a powerful national movement of Local Involvement Networks (LINKs), actively monitoring health and social care. LINKs members are in the vanguard of the movement to involve users, carers and patients in every aspect of the monitoring and improvement of health and social care services. We are the only genuine statutory way for the public to get involved," said Mr Alexander.

"NALM will turn local issues into national campaigns - the needless deaths recently exposed at Stafford Hospital have demonstrated yet again the need for a powerful grassroots public involvement movement that can quickly identify major problems in health and social care services. Communities have been disempowered by the Government's chaotic policy of repeatedly abolishing statutory public involvement health and social care bodies, whilst at the same time claiming we are vitally important. Volunteers who spend their valuable time monitoring, inspecting, advising and campaigning to improve and transform their local services must be supported by the Government, and need a sign of the Government's support."

"It is incomprehensible that Health Ministers are unwilling to attend the NALM launch to support patients, users and carers who are leading implementation of LINKs - a major government initiative intended to give power to communities across the country in their health and social care services. We are so disappointed that we have asked Prime Minister Gordon Brown to intervene to ensure that LINKs receive the full support and commitment of the Department of Health, not least by showing up at our first ever meeting."

**Malcolm Alexander, Chair**  
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