

TO:
All Chairs in NHS Trusts in England
All Chairs in NHS Foundation Trusts in England

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Dear colleagues,

PATIENTS FIRST AND FOREMOST

You will have seen that the Government has published '*Patients First and Foremost*'¹ today, our initial response on behalf of the whole health and care system to the report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry². It details key actions to ensure that patients are '*the first and foremost consideration of the system and everyone who works in it*' and to restore the NHS to its core values as set out in the NHS Constitution.

This is a call to action for every individual and organisation within the health and care system, to reflect on our behaviours and priorities. I know that many of you are delivering outstanding care, and this should not be taken as a negative reflection on the hard work that many in your organisations are doing to respond to the many pressures facing the NHS. However there are lessons for all of us to learn from the appalling events at Stafford Hospital, and it is important that we do so.

Our response is divided into five areas, designed to improve the care that people receive from the NHS:

1. Preventing problems;
2. Detecting problems quickly;
3. Taking action promptly;
4. Ensuring robust accountability; and
5. Ensuring staff are trained and motivated

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-initial-response-to-the-mid-staffs-report>

² www.midstaffpublicinquiry.com/report

National organisations have signed up to a 'Statement of Common Purpose', which sets out a simple premise that I know you will all endorse: that the NHS is there to serve patients and must therefore put the needs, the voice and the choices of patients ahead of all other considerations. Together, through delivering this response, we can bring energy and commitment to tackling poor care, by detecting and exposing unacceptable care quickly and ensuring that the system takes real responsibility for fixing problems urgently and effectively. It will underpin the compassionate values of NHS staff with the right training and leadership needed to ensure consistently safe, effective and respectful care.

In order to support staff to bring about this cultural change, we have also published today a revised NHS Constitution³ that takes account of the lessons from the Public Inquiry, and makes clear to staff the importance of common values, and in particular the fundamental value of "working together for patients". We will consult on further amendments to the NHS Constitution later this year in order to respond in full to the Inquiry's recommendations.

Where teams are committed to the values set out in the Constitution, I really believe that we will see real and lasting change. Last month, I wrote to all of you to request that all Trusts hold internal events to listen to staff about how the NHS can remain true to its core values of care and compassion, even when times are difficult. I look forward to reading about the outcome of these sessions and how your organisations plan to enact real and lasting changes in order to put patients first and deliver excellence.

A number of national organisations will be hosting events across the system to share insights, ideas and inspiration. In the meantime, comments are welcome at FrancisResponse@dh.gsi.gov.uk, and I would be grateful if all Trusts could share the feedback from their own events by the end of December 2013. In addition, all NHS hospitals should set out publicly how they intend to respond to the Inquiry's conclusions before the end of the year.

I urge all of you and your staff to work with us as we take forward this response so that collectively we can make a reality of placing patients at the heart of a safe, compassionate NHS.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nhs-constitution-for-england>

Jeremy

JEREMY HUNT