



Date: 06 February 2013

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To:
All Chief Executives of NHS Trusts in England
All Chief Executives of NHS Foundation Trusts in England
All Chief Executives of Strategic Healthcare Authorities in England
All Chief Executives of Primary Care Trusts in England
Clinical Commissioning Group Accountable Officers and Clinical Leaders

Cc:
Monitor
All Chief Executives of Local Authorities in England

Gateway reference: 18732

Dear Colleague

Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry

Today marks an important moment for the NHS: the people who work in it, the people it cares for, and the people who rely on it being there for them when they need it. The long-anticipated publication of the Robert Francis report describes not just what happened at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, but sets out in graphic detail what happens when the NHS fails to put patients first.

And it makes uncomfortable reading. Because like me, I am sure that you joined the NHS because of your commitment to patient care and public service. I know that every day you are working hard, saving and improving the lives of patients and their families. But sometimes we fall short of the standards that our patients and public rightly expect of us. And although we know that the NHS treats 1 million people every 36 hours, we also know that we would never accept this as an excuse if it was our child or parent that was harmed.

Unfortunately, we cannot go back and undo the damage and distress experienced by patients in the community served by Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust. I have already apologised on behalf of the NHS to the people of Stafford for the widespread failings, and do so again unreservedly. But moving forward, the most important thing we can all do now is to learn from the quality failings exposed in the report and use them to ensure that we drive out poor care in the NHS, so that no matter where patients are treated, they can be confident that their needs, both emotional and physical, will come first.

But if we are to learn the lessons of Mid Staffordshire, then every individual needs to take the time to read the full report published today by Robert Francis, and most important of all, make the time to reflect on what went so badly wrong at every level of the service. I would ask you all to reflect carefully on the findings of the report, in the context of the services you deliver, and discuss it in a public board meeting. The Secretary of State is today writing to the chairs of every organisation asking that internal events are held with staff to listen to them, and to ask them, not just what we can learn from Francis, but also how, in an ever busier NHS, we can make sure that we provide every patient with a service that stays true to our core values of care and compassion.

The timing could not be more urgent. As we move towards a new healthcare system, the Robert Francis report provides a salutary reminder to us all of what can happen if organisations care more about their statutory roles and processes rather than doing what is best for patients. This is a watershed moment for the NHS. We have to seize this opportunity to create not just another set of action plans, but to drive the cultural change in the NHS further and faster, so that the values and principles set out in the NHS Constitution become part of the DNA of every ward and board.

Because although much of the media will quite rightly focus on what happens when the NHS gets it wrong, I know that what motivates you is the pride you feel when we get it right. As Robert Francis himself says in his report:

'The NHS is a service of which the country can be justly proud, offering as it does universal access to free medical care, often of the highest order. It is a service staffed by thousands of dedicated and committed staff and managers who have been shocked by what they heard of the events surrounding by the Trust. It is inconceivable to many of them that condition of the type described by so many patients can have been allowed to exist, let alone persist.'

I will be writing out again in the coming weeks as the Government considers how best to take forward Robert Francis's recommendations. But I know that you won't want to wait to be told what to do. Because the real passion for improvement and the power to deliver it lies in your hands: our staff who go to work every day with the sole aim of improving and saving lives.

So please, read the report, reflect upon the findings, discuss and debate the recommendations with your colleagues, friends and families. Most of all, talk and listen to the patients you serve, and together we can build a momentum for improvement, and an NHS of which we can all be proud.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Nicholson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Sir David Nicholson KCB CBE
NHS Chief Executive