



Public Health
England



Duncan Selbie
Chief Executive

Friday message

8 February 2013

Dear everyone

The hardest thing to do as a leader is to create an environment where people feel able to tell the truth and that they genuinely see this as their duty. Different perspectives may mean we see the truth differently – the important thing is that whatever your version of the truth is, you need to be able to tell it and the organisation needs to listen and to act on it. What matters are the choices we make in the moment, and especially when we think we are unobserved, that truly define great care and service. In my time in Brighton, when patients or relatives wrote to the local daily newspaper they would sometimes mention the exquisite skill of the surgeon or the diagnostic brilliance of the physician but they would unfailingly mention the presence or absence of kindness and compassion from those who looked after them. So it is not sufficient to be technically good, we also need to make it very evident that we genuinely care about the people we are providing a service for, as well as for them. I don't want to add to the mountain of comment about what Francis had to say on Mid Staffs, save only that we all need to reflect on what it means for us as individuals and organisations. What I do want to say is that I recognise my personal responsibility for creating an environment within the public health system where telling the truth, however hard that sometimes may be, defines us.

I am very glad to say that a series of very positive discussions has led to [agreement](#) on five areas of collaboration between PHE and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). These include communicating with and supporting the local public health system, reviewing evidence and providing evidence-based guidance and other products, providing access to evidence, providing support to put guidance into practice and creating a standard public health taxonomy. Professor John Newton, Chief Knowledge Officer, is leading on this for PHE.

We will also be working closely with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health as a valued partner. Environmental health practitioners are public health professionals with an important role in the wider public health family and they are fundamentally there to protect and improve health. Environmental health was the original public health service and environmental health professionals to this day make a practical and lasting difference to community safety, from trading standards making sure goods and services are safe to ensuring that the elderly do not live in conditions that are infested by cockroaches and bedbugs. I saw the full breadth of this during a morning spent with the environmental health team in Wandsworth, ably led by Marie Whitbread. We are particularly keen to include this professional group in our workforce strategy and will work with the CIEH to establish how best to do this, as I explained in a recent [interview](#) with Environmental Health News.

And finally, the Chief Medical Officer, Professor Dame Sally Davies, has set out one of the clearest explanations of the need for the new public health system in a recent [interview](#) and I suggest everyone might take a few minutes to give it a read.

With best wishes