



Public Health
England



Duncan Selbie
Chief Executive

Friday message

Friday 19 July 2013

Dear everyone

We share and understand the disappointment across the public health family that neither standardised packaging nor minimum unit pricing are to be taken forward for the moment by Government. With tobacco and alcohol being among the nation's top killers this is, however, hopefully a case of not now, rather than never. Both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State have made clear that they are open to further evidence emerging. Let us not forget, nine out of ten smokers begin as children and helping them make better choices is a child protection concern. Likewise, the evidence tells us that doing all we can to reduce the ready availability of cheap, higher strength alcohol helps the youngest and the heaviest drinkers most. We must never sacrifice what we can get for what we want as public health professionals and what we want often takes time. Think of smoking in public places and seat belt legislation. For example, we will exploit to the full the measure announced by the Home Office on Wednesday to create local alcohol action areas, in partnership with local government and the local NHS.

Last Friday I joined Sir Mike Rawlins, formerly the Chair of NICE, the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire, representatives from the local authority and the clinical commissioning group, together with the area director of NHS England, and senior police officers at an amazing celebration at the Kingfisher Church in Gloucester. Led by their extraordinary pastor Jan Burn, the church provides support and a range of activities seven days a week for people with profound learning disabilities and others often considered on the margins of society. What we witnessed was the culmination of months of hard work presented in a summer concert of drama, dance and music. Many of the participants were profoundly disabled, needing at least one-to-one care, yet in each of them an exceptional talent had been discovered and we were privileged to see them perform. This is what we mean by health and wellbeing being more than diagnosis and treatment. Pastor Jan is an unsung hero. The worries weighing on my mind fell away before the remarkable people I met and watched. Humbling and inspiring in equal measure. We know there are others doing similar great work around our communities but there can be few who are as dedicated and effective. To be with people with such disadvantage showing such joy in what they have puts you in touch with what really matters. Congratulations to Jan and her team of volunteers for all they do.

Last week we opened a fantastic new £10m laboratory on the Heartlands Hospital campus in a partnership between PHE and the Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust in Birmingham. This will enable our two organisations to provide a modern and efficient pathology service to the West Midlands as well as an up-to-the-minute public health microbiology service.

And finally, congratulations to everyone involved in Bowel and Cancer Screening in Kent and Medway who won first prize for their Bowel Cancer Screening stand – which included a walk through colon – at the Kent Show last weekend. Not surprisingly the stand attracted the attention of a number of the harder to reach groups such as men and the elderly.

With best wishes