

Public Health England

Friday message



Duncan Selbie
Chief Executive Designate

14 September 2012

Dear everyone

I want to focus this week on the importance of our science and research base. I know our staff working in microbiology and in radiation, chemical and environmental hazards have been concerned that their contribution to PHE might get overlooked. Quite the contrary – science and research will be at the heart of our work and success.

In speaking with the leaders of local government, they have a profound understanding that some things need expertise assembled at national level. Our research and science is a good example of what is meant by this and supports everyone's work on health protection, health improvement and population health. This might perhaps be more visible in our evidence and intelligence contribution, but it is exactly the same for our science and research. Our national centres of expertise compete today with the best in the world, recognising that we are not yet there in all we do. In the short term we are refreshing our research strategy in health protection and developing our science and research strategy for Public Health England as a whole. We will be consulting on this in the coming months.

I am having lots of opportunities to meet people in the field and this week have witnessed astonishing leadership and impact in areas as diverse as tackling early avoidable deaths from breast cancer, engaging the homeless in intensive treatment for TB, tackling teenagers' smoking, and in improving access to confidential sexual health services. On a visit to Newham I was very struck by a point made by Cllr Clive Furness, their executive member for health. He said that their new public health responsibilities would set the narrative for what a 21st century local authority is for in much the same way as there was a clear sense of purpose for local government in 1895 and 1945. Newham Council is creating capability and resilience within their communities, and their public health team is doing all they can to support this. Rachel Flowers, Newham's Director of Public Health, described work with a girls' secondary school where over 90% of the students come from south Asian communities. Having identified very poor breast cancer survival rates amongst Asian women, Newham worked with the school, training the girls to identify signs and symptoms, do breast self-examination and then spread the message out to their mums. Other work has led to an improvement in breast screening attendance from 56% to over 68% and it continues to improve. They have an utter disregard for those who say you cannot reach the "hard to reach". Yes you can and they are proving this. The "Find and Treat" mobile X-ray service for tackling TB in the homeless in London, led by Dr Al Story, is a further example of an effective way of taking an essential service directly to the people who need it most and is something I wish to see extended nationally.

Finally, we are on schedule to appoint our national directors by the middle of October and we expect to appoint the Regional Directors by the end of that month and the Centre Directors during November and certainly by Christmas. I am very confident that we will be able to make excellent appointments.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Duncan Selbie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.