

Your views matter: wide ranging review of NHS services launched

Dear colleague,

Next year marks the 60th anniversary of the National Health Service. While the challenges our service faces today may be radically different to those it faced in 1948, the fundamental principles that underpin the NHS have remained constant throughout the last six decades.

The service has seen many changes over the last 59 years, but, arguably, the last five years have been among the most testing for NHS staff as we have faced the dual challenge of using unprecedented investment to deliver increased capacity while driving through radical and bold reforms.

Any objective assessment shows that the NHS is performing better than ever, with more than one million operations taking place each year, waiting lists down and patient satisfaction rates up. Yet subjectively and anecdotally, there has been confusion and frustration across the NHS with many staff suffering from reform fatigue.

This lack of confidence and strained morale matters, not only because it has an impact on our ability to deliver patient care, but because it suggests that our most important asset – you, our staff – have not always been as involved in the changes that have been made to the NHS as you should have been.

So, to ensure that we move forward together in a more cohesive way, we are today announcing a wide-ranging review of the NHS, which will be led by Professor Sir Ara Darzi – one of the world's leading surgeons and a newly-appointed Minister who will continue to practise medicine.

The review, which has the full backing of the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, will consider the case for a constitution of the NHS as the basis of a sustainable and lasting settlement that meets these challenges, enhances local accountability, secures value for money and protects the fundamental values that the NHS has always embodied.

We have a once in a generation opportunity to ensure that a properly resourced NHS is patient-centred, clinically-led and locally accountable. This can only happen if we seriously strive to ensure that the conversations that underpin this review afford you, NHS staff, our patients and the public the genuine opportunity to contribute views on the shape of the kind of NHS they want to use and work in.

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Professor Darzi will engage directly with frontline staff, not just the great and good of the health world, in leading his review. Over the coming weeks and months everyone who is part of the NHS will have opportunities to take part in this review, and, building on the relationships local NHS organisations already have with their communities and stakeholders, every part of every community will have the opportunity to contribute their thoughts and ideas.

While the review will produce an interim report this October and will conclude in June next year, we must continue to work hard to drive forward locally-led changes to improve services for our patients.

You can contribute any initial thoughts on the review to our mailbox, nextstage@dh.gsi.gov.uk ahead of the launch of the review website.

Professor Sir Ara Darzi will be engaging with NHS staff and stakeholders over the next week to test and develop the process for how we take this forward.

Your views matter: we can only develop a robust social partnership between patients, practitioners and policy makers that is truly underpinned by trust, honesty and respect, with your involvement.

Alan Johnson Secretary of State for Health

Professor Sir Ara Darzi Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

David Nicholson CBE NHS Chief Executive