

Letter regarding the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection consultation

30.10.03



Sustainable
Development Commission

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Professor Sir Ian Kennedy
Shadow Chair
Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection
990 Long Acre
London WC2E 9RZ

30 October 2003

Dear Professor Kennedy,

RE: Vision for the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection (CHAI)

I was interested to read the vision document for CHAI and especially welcome the inclusion of public health in the Commission's remit. I am writing to comment specifically on the public health element of the vision, as I believe the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC), as the Government's independent advisor on sustainable development, can help with the challenges you face in defining and assessing public health activity.

Public health is an essential element of sustainable development and needs to be seen more widely than simply health promotion and environmental health activity. Through its corporate activities, as an employer, purchaser, commissioner of building work and manager of energy, waste and transport, the NHS has the potential to influence and enhance local social, economic and environmental conditions. Enhancing these conditions impacts positively on people's health, which in turn helps to contain levels of demand for NHS services.

Within this context, most NHS corporate activity can contribute to public health, be it through procuring healthier food locally or building hospitals in ways that impact positively on the health of patients, staff and visitors, by considering its design, travel implications, inclusion of green spaces, and by supporting local suppliers and the local workforce.

This emphasizes the importance of concentrating on population health, rather than patient health in assessing how the NHS is supporting and promoting public health. The experiences of local communities need to be taken into account alongside patients' experiences to enable a meaningful assessment. And communities must be seen not only as recipients of NHS services. If the NHS were to become a better 'corporate citizen' it would impact positively on the local communities' quality of life and health.

We would also suggest that the Commission use its influence to ensure that public health standards are integral to the common set of health care standards set out by the Secretary of State. We realise that without appropriate standards, the essential public health agenda will be at risk from being left behind, given the scope and size of your remit.

The SDC has recently started a work programme, funded by the Department of Health, to promote sustainability in the NHS. *Healthy Futures* aims to support the NHS in exploring how it can maximise its contribution to a healthier population, a better environment and stronger economies and communities. It will focus initially on two areas of NHS corporate activity: food and the capital building programme. I have enclosed a copy of our introductory publication to give you an overview of the SDC's work in the health sector. This is led by one of our Commissioners, Anna Coote, who is also a member of your Advisory Board.

Our health team would be happy to meet with you or your officials to discuss these issues. One of the Team will in touch with your offices shortly to follow up this letter. I hope that the Sustainable Development Commission can work with you to ensure that your public health function supports the NHS in adopting a sustainable approach to managing its services.

Yours sincerely,

Jonathon Porritt
Chair
Sustainable Development Commission