

**Response to Consultation on Respite Care Guidance  
South Edinburgh Public and Patient Forum – January 2008**

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the paper “Independent Scrutiny – The Independent examination of proposals for major change in NHS services”.

In general the group on behalf of which I am responding (South Edinburgh Public and Patient Forum) is wholly behind the principle of independent scrutiny of proposals to establish an accurate evidence base on which to consult about major NHS changes. How effective the preferred method of using an independent panel will be, we think will depend heavily on the true independence and skill of the panel members. The recently constituted Walker panel appeared to have a good mix of skills, with appropriately eminent members, and a satisfactory transparent outcome. We had a query about exactly how “major” was to be defined – what an NHS Board sees as major may differ from what a patient sees as major.

Following the issues on which you sought comment:-

Question 1: Do you agree that an expert panel is the most effective way to provide independent scrutiny? If not, what would be your preferred choice?

Yes, providing the members and chair are truly independent and of sufficiently high calibre to command the confidence of all concerned parties. Our group would not favour involvement of the Scottish Health Council. It is suggested a model along the lines of the Reporter’s Inquiry Unit or HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary may be worth consideration.

Question 2: Do you agree that the role of the panel should be to assess the safety, sustainability, evidence-base and value for money of NHS Boards proposals for major changes to local NHS services?

We agree with all the parameters included for the role of the panel, but we suggest it would be helpful to include in the role something about “patient focus” or “patient benefit”.

Question 3: Do you agree that the chair should be a lay person appointed by Scottish Ministers?

Yes.

Question 4: Do you agree that the panel should have a lay majority among its members?

Yes. It may be necessary to define the term “lay”. Is it envisaged that retired or ex medical professionals would qualify as lay for example? The public would not necessarily regard such professionals as sufficiently independent particularly if there were a number or majority on each panel. The group also envisaged an “on-going” panel from which members are selected to undertake specific reviews. The members of the overarching ‘panel’ would be expected to develop expertise in the assessment of health and health care needs.

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Question 5: Do you agree that the panel should assess the evidence and options during the process of public engagement prior to consultation, and provide a commentary on these that would be available to the Board and to Ministers in reaching decisions?

Yes. We welcome the aspiration to be genuinely transparent. The view of one of our group, with which we agreed, was that trusting the public and laying out the evidence for a decision made it understandable and therefore much more acceptable when the reasons for the decision were evident.

Question 6. Do you have any other comments on how independent scrutiny should be carried out, or on the guidance on "Informing, engaging and consulting the public in developing health and community care services" at Annex 3?

Yes. We suggest that the PPFs (Public Partnership Forums) will be one of the ways to engage with the public and patients but they must be properly resourced to do the job. We suggest Community Councils, User groups, especially those who represent people with mental health issues and long term conditions all have their part to play. We should like to see guidance strengthened to this effect.

Question 7 Do you have any other comments on either the consultation process or your preferred choice?

We welcome the fact that the public are being consulted about issues such as this. As with every consultation exercise it helps if the consultation is genuine and that cognisance is taken of the views of the public.

We are also of the view that independent panels may be the way forward for consultations on school matters or other issues.

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