

**Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> February**

Sir, As the Health and Social Care Bill reaches committee stage today, we - eight of the UK's leading health charities, representing millions of patients – are calling on MPs to make crucial changes to ensure the NHS will be answerable to everyone it serves. We've heard about the concerns of NHS professionals – now we must listen to the voice of patients.

We support the Government's aim to create a culture of 'no decision about me without me' and put patient involvement and democratic accountability at the heart of the health system. However, there is currently a gap between rhetoric and reality. The reforms will place £80 billion of the NHS budget into the hands of GPs, but plans to make GP consortia accountable to the public are far too weak.

The plans will allow local authorities to replace existing democratically elected overview and scrutiny committees with their own systems. Given the unprecedented devolution of power, we urge the Government to amend the Bill and insist on a strong independent scrutiny function led by democratically elected representatives.

Greater patient and public involvement leads to better care and more efficient services which really reflect the needs of the local population, yet proposed reforms do little to give patients a stronger voice at a local level. The new local HealthWatch bodies described in the Bill will not have the powers or resources to ensure patients have a say in their local health services. If they are to serve a meaningful purpose they must be significantly strengthened. To make the 'information revolution' a reality, there must be genuine transparency about decisions and local provision.

If the new NHS is to properly serve patients and the public, this democratic deficit must be addressed and the voices of patients heard by those making crucial decisions affecting their lives.

Jeremy Hughes, CEO, Alzheimer's Society

Neil Churchill, CEO Asthma UK

Chris Askew, CEO, Breakthrough Breast cancer

Barbara Young, CEO, Diabetes UK

Jeremy Taylor, CEO, National Voices

Paul Jenkins, CEO, Rethink

Betty McBride, Director of Policy, British Heart Foundation

Jon Barrick, CEO, The Stroke Association