

# just a minute with...

## Nick Clegg, Leader of the Liberal Democrats and MP for Sheffield Hallam

### Heart and circulatory disease is still the UK's biggest killer. How do you plan to prevent it in the future?

The NHS is a wonderful institution but we need to change the way money is spent so preventing disease is a priority. This means promoting healthier active lifestyles, ensuring better nutrition and improving screening and risk assessment programmes. I'd like to see NICE do work to identify cost-effective public health interventions – currently they have to give priority to assessing new drugs.

We also have to recognise that we as individuals have a responsibility too. We can't ignore the fact that smoking, drinking and fatty food cause enormous damage to our hearts. Improving health education is vital.

### How will you tackle existing health inequalities?

First: recognise the problem, which is enormous. In my city of Sheffield, a child born in the poorest neighbourhood will die 14 years before a child born just up the road in a wealthier area. Second: tackle it by recognising that health inequalities are closely related to how unequal our society is and we have to work across all areas of public policy to reduce inequality. We must create a fairer society, improving housing, education and health services, with a particular focus on public health. I want to see primary care trusts, social services, housing associations, community regeneration projects and schools working together with local people

to achieve healthier outcomes for everyone.

### How will you ensure the UK remains a leader of medical research?

Public spending is going to be under serious pressure over the next few years so the Liberal Democrats are doing everything we can to identify where the Government is wasting money so we can protect the areas that really matter. Heavy cuts to research budgets would be a mistake when our spending on research and development still lags behind other countries.

Two other specific points: The NHS should be a fantastic resource for recruiting patients for clinical trials, but it's a missed opportunity at the moment. We must recognise that some forms of animal research have a role to play in finding new medicines – that's why we have supported scientists when they have been attacked for their research.

### How will you ensure that patients are involved in decision making?

We believe people are best able to determine the priorities of the NHS in their area so we'd put local people in charge, holding elections to local health boards so every community had a direct say in their health services. We also need services that are more

responsive to individual needs: patients often feel they are lost in a bureaucratic machine.

I want to introduce patient advocates to support people through the system and I'm really interested in extending personal budgets, especially for people with long-term conditions, where patients are allocated money and have control over how it's spent.

### How do you look after your own heart health?

I play tennis most weeks, I (almost) always walk up the four flights of stairs at work rather than take the lift, and I do a lot of running around and walking with my family at weekends. I try to eat healthily, too.

### During National Heart Month we are encouraging people to leave a love note in BHF shops. Who would you write your love note to and why?

My family: my wife, Miriam, our three children, and my parents and brothers and sisters. I grew up part of a big, warm, loving family and it's always been the central part of my life. |

 Want to comment on what the party leaders have said? Take part in the debate at [bhf.org.uk/blog](http://bhf.org.uk/blog)

Look out for an update in Spring 2011 when elections take place in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.