

Press release

28 July 2004

## **NHS Confederation Welcomes Plan for Improved Public Health and Says Now is the Time for Action**

The Chief Medical Officer's report provides a welcome manifesto for improving public health but it is time we started putting such plans into practice, the NHS Confederation said today. Also, the proposal to make NHS premises smoke-free is laudable but must be implemented without undue disruption to staff and patients.

Dr Gill Morgan, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, said "Public health is always identified as a top priority for the NHS, but it is time we made real progress on this issue possible. Our survey of NHS chief executives last month found that public health should be the number one priority for the political parties in their manifestos, but when it comes to the crunch targets and waiting lists are always given precedence."

In response to the proposal to make the NHS smoke-free by the end of the year, Gill said "This is a very welcome idea, and it is important that the NHS should be seen as leading the way in creating smoke-free workplaces nationwide. However, there are genuine challenges in implementing this policy within the next five months. Such a ban must not disrupt the treatment of patients, specifically some mental health users, and it is important NHS organisations are able to consult with their staff over the introduction of the ban. This would create a very tight timetable for action."

Gill added: "This report provides a useful resource for those working on public health in the NHS, and it is important it is followed up with more information and support for staff and patients. We also need to examine how we fund programmes to tackle health inequalities, so that money is not diverted into more immediate areas of the health service. We think there is a case for creating a separate investment fund for health improvement, so that initiatives to improve long-term health compete for resources with day-to-day service provision."

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. The NHS Confederation represents the organisations that make up the NHS. Our members include the majority of NHS trusts, primary care trusts and health authorities in England; trusts and local health boards in Wales; trusts and NHS boards in Scotland; and health and social services trusts and boards in Northern Ireland.
2. The Confederation surveyed 100 NHS chief executives in June this year, and asked what the top three health priorities for the political party manifestos should be. Public health issues, including smoking, alcohol and obesity, were the most popular response, mentioned by 52 chief executives.
3. An ISDN line is available for radio interviews (020 7959 7283). To arrange an ISDN interview please contact Chris Atkinson at the Press Office on 020 7959 7240