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## **NHS CONFEDERATION GIVES ITS VIEWS ON NEW HEALTH RATINGS SYSTEM**

The NHS Confederation has broadly welcomed a proposed new ratings system to measure the performance of NHS trusts which is due to replace the current 'star ratings' - but expressed some serious concerns about how the system will work in practice.

Its comments are included in the organisation's official response to the Healthcare Commission's consultation on proposals for new standards of assessment - the consultation period finished last week and the new ratings system is due to start in April.

The NHS Confederation, which represents the organisations that make up the NHS, finalised its response after obtaining the views of members through policy committees, membership networks and a series of consultation events held in partnership with the Healthcare Commission which were attended by more than 300 NHS organisations.

Gary Fereday, NHS Confederation policy manager, says: "The NHS Confederation believes that the overall concept and direction of travel of the Healthcare Commission's proposals for a new ratings system are broadly right.

"However, there are clear messages from our members that there are still too many targets, and the standards and process of NHS trusts carrying out self-assessments of their performance against each of the 24 core standards needs developing.

"Our members support the need for regulation and performance assessment but they feel that, as the proposals stand, they are too complex and represent a bureaucratic burden.

Key concerns raised by the NHS Confederation in its official response to the consultation include:

" Uncertainty about the status of 'prompts' (designed to help NHS trusts map their progress against the core standards that form part of the new health ratings system) and concern that these could become a set of proxy targets.

" Concern that there are still too many national targets, set by the Department of Health, and in the case of some targets it is not easy to see a relationship between the process of hitting a target and the outcome of better care for patients.

" The assessment process appears to be trying to ensure minimum standards; support choice for patients and users of services; and underpin a development agenda - the NHS Confederation "questions whether it will be able to do all three of these things to the required level without modification".

" Foundation Trusts are concerned that there will be duplication and uncertainty created as a result of tensions between the role of the Healthcare Commission and Monitor, the independent regulator of NHS Foundation Trusts - if these tensions are not resolved, the NHS Confederation fears they will lead to "contradictory demands, an unacceptable regulatory burden and all round confusion".

Gary Fereday says: "We look forward to working with the Healthcare Commission and the Department of Health to see how the assessment process can be simplified to genuinely measure issues of concern to patients and the public.

"We welcome the fact that the Healthcare Commission is listening to our members' concerns and appeared to be responding as the consultation process unfolded."