

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
TUESDAY 6 JULY 2004

CONFEDERATION CALLS FOR END TO NHS BUREAUCRACY BIDDING WAR

Responding to today's Conservative Party announcement of the initial findings of the James Committee, NHS Confederation chief executive Gill Morgan said:

"The political parties' efforts to outbid each other with claims to cut NHS bureaucracy is both damaging and unimaginative. Of course the NHS can improve the way it works. But picking savings figures out of the air and then working backwards to see how you can make them stack up does little to help NHS staff in the real task of improving patient care.

"It is hard to see how some of the savings can be achieved, particularly the changes to commissioning. There is a set of tasks that can't just be stopped - from managing budgets and planning services to providing information to ensure patients can make informed choices. This will still require resources, whether the tasks are carried out by Primary Care Trusts or GPs."

Commenting on the proposal to abolish Strategic Health Authorities, Gill Morgan said: "There has always been a tendency for Governments and Opposition parties to believe that every solution to problems in the NHS is restructuring. History has shown that this only serves to distract NHS managers and clinicians from getting to grips with the day to day changes that will really transform services for patients."

While considerable progress has been made in reducing the burden of reporting in the NHS, the Confederation agrees that there is still further progress to be made. However, it has concerns about the Conservative Party proposal to dismantle all national performance targets. A small number of national targets can help to drive the improvements that matter most to patients and enable the service to be held to account for the money it spends.

Gill Morgan added: "This bureaucracy bidding war also serves to perpetuate the myth that the NHS is over-managed, when in reality, only 4p in every pound is spent on management costs, and independent bodies like the Audit Commission have said that management capacity in the NHS is thinly spread."

Ends

Notes for 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 service trusts and boards in Northern Ireland.
2. An ISDN line is available for radio interviews (020 7959 7283). To arrange an ISDN interview please contact Jenny Reindorp on 020 7959 7237.