

From the Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP
Secretary of State for Health



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The Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP
House of Commons
Westminster
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Dear Tessa,

25 MAR 2010

Thank you for your letter of 18 March enclosing an example of correspondence you have received from a number of your constituents in support of the Royal College of Nursing's campaign, *Nursing Counts*.

The Department appreciates the important contribution that nurses make to the NHS. The areas outlined in the campaign are included in current policy, and I shall address each of the campaign's six points in turn.

The Department expects NHS Trusts to have policies in place that encourage feedback from staff and pre-empt the need to whistleblow. For those rare occasions where whistleblowing is the appropriate course of action, we have provided unprecedented protection for individuals and we emphasise in the NHS Constitution the right not to be unfairly dismissed for 'whistleblowing' or reporting wrongdoing. Listening to and acting upon concerns of staff are vital ways to drive up standards.

Following the recommendations of the recent House of Commons Select Committee report on Patient Safety, the Department will be updating and re-issuing guidance to the NHS, working in conjunction with NHS Employers, Public Concern at Work and Trade Unions. The guidance is intended to help employers who are in the process of creating or updating their whistleblowing procedures.

Turning to staffing levels, it is for local NHS Trusts to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities and to commission services accordingly. This process provides the means for addressing local needs within the health community including the provision and numbers of nurses and their ratio to patients.

The number of staff will vary according to skill mix, clinical practice and local factors. Our view is that nurse leaders should retain the freedom locally to agree their own staff profiles. This gives flexibility to respond dynamically to changes in patient demand and workforce supply.

Regarding training opportunities for nurses, employers have a duty to ensure that staff have the appropriate education and training to deliver priorities and services and this is supported through the NHS Constitution staff pledges.

Employers make local decisions on the amount of time made available to allow staff to access continuing professional development (CPD) such as training courses or learning opportunities. CPD needs for NHS staff are determined against local NHS priorities, through appraisal processes and training needs analyses.

The campaign also calls for each child to have access to a school nurse. It is for Primary Care Trusts, in partnership with local authorities, strategic health authorities and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, and to commission services accordingly.

There are about 3,000 secondary schools. The 2008 NHS Workforce Census shows that there were 3,645 qualified nurses in school nursing areas (headcount equivalent), an increase of 1,234 or 51 per cent since 2004.

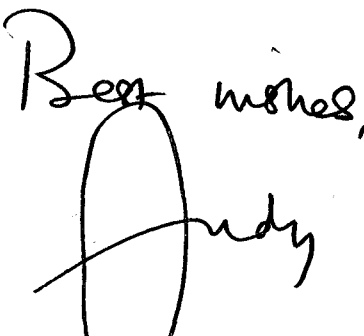
In relation to health awareness campaigns, we continue to support the uptake of the Healthy Schools programme in all maintained schools in England and 99 per cent of all schools are currently participating.

Turning next to care for those with long-term conditions, as independent employers, local NHS organisations are responsible for the skill mix of their workforce, including the number of specialist nurses. They are best-placed to assess the health needs of their local community and must have the freedom to train and deploy staff in ways that are appropriate for local conditions.

To help Trusts develop specialist nursing roles we have published *Long Term Neurological Conditions: A good practice guide to the development of the multidisciplinary team and the value of the specialist nurse*. This guide has been prepared for commissioners and managers to highlight the role and contribution of specialist nurses. These principles are transferable to other specialities.

Finally, we are already committed to substantial growth in NHS resources next year. We are now taking that further and we will protect frontline NHS spending for the following two years to 2012/13. By making tough efficiency savings this will mean we can continue to increase real term resources available for patient care, year by year.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Best wishes,

ANDY BURNHAM