

Professor Malcolm Grant
Chair
NHS England
Quarry House
Quarry Hill
Leeds
LS2 7UE

21 May 2013

Dear Malcolm

I have worked in the NHS for 35 years in over 14 organisations covering all care groups and parts of the NHS. During this time I have only ever had one ambition: to improve the quality of care for patients. This is why after serving as NHS Chief Executive for almost seven years I agreed to provide stability for the system by leading NHS England during the transition. Over the last year, the NHS has continued to deliver high quality care to patients whilst undergoing the most radical and dramatic change in our history. The new ways of working are now taking shape, and I have therefore decided that in March 2014, after two years in the post, I will retire as CEO of NHS England.

I still passionately believe in what NHS England has set out to do and in Everyone Counts we committed to put patients at the heart of everything we do with the aim of improving patient outcomes. This must happen and my hope is that by being clear about my intentions now this will give you and the board the opportunity to attract candidates of the very highest calibre and you can appoint someone who will be able to see this essential work through to its completion. I know that you will be determined not to lose momentum so that you can build on the considerable progress NHS England has already made in putting patients at the heart of the new health system.

Whilst I believe we have made significant progress together under my leadership, recent events continue to show that on occasion the NHS can still sometimes fail patients, their families and carers. This continues to be a matter of profound regret to me but please know that on a daily basis I continue, and will always continue, to be inspired and moved by the passion that those who work in the NHS continue to show.

In getting ourselves ready for the 1 April 2013 we should take great pride in how the GP led commissioning groups are now taking forward the quality agenda that I established with Lord Darzi. In addition, I take some confidence from the genuine efforts our staff are making to understand and learn from the complex issues that Robert Francis exposed in his recent report. I also want to recognise the efforts of the leadership community in the NHS: their recent efforts working in such a challenging environment have been nothing short of heroic.

I would like to thank you for the support you have given me as both a CEO and as a person during this past year. It has been a tremendous privilege and a challenge to serve as the NHS Chief Executive, the CEO of NHS England and the person tasked with the responsibility of overseeing the NHS transition simultaneously. Whilst this unique set of circumstances was in the best interests of a safe transition, I recognise it was not always an ideal situation for the board, and I am grateful for the patience and understanding that you continue to demonstrate with regard to the complexity of my role during this challenging time for the NHS.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the wider reforms, the creation of a national organisation with the independence and resources to act in the interests of patients remains a prize worth fighting for and even in retirement I will continue to be the staunchest advocate of the NHS.

I look forward to working with you and the board during the next year, where we will continue to build the capacity of the new commissioning system, to ensure that health services are wrapped around the needs of patients and their families.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Nicholson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Sir David Nicholson
Chief Executive