



18th July 2005



Dear

Equitable Choice - Consulting community organisations on Support to Patients

Last year you participated in a *Taking Soundings* exercise with Health Link. This was about Patients' Choice and choosing hospitals. As a result of the strong views you and others expressed, Health Link was able to set up a project with London's NHS, to find out the information about hospitals you told us people needed to know, and offer it to patients. This will start as a test project with patients choosing hospitals, in the next few weeks. This would not have happened without your input.

Building on this work, Health Link is now working with Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) on the second important need you and other organisations highlighted to us: support for people to choose hospitals. Health Link and IPPR are both independent not for profit organisations. Health Link works to give people a say in health services. IPPR works to influence government by delivering realistic ideas for a fairer, more inclusive society. We hope you will give us your views again so we can try and make sure all NHS patients really do have a choice.

Charitable Donation: We know that people working in community organisations often get asked for their views and that this may interfere with your core work. If you can find time to give us your views again, we will to make a small donation of £50 to your organisation. We will also be as flexible as possible about how you give your views, to minimise disruption to your work. You can respond to us by

- Response Form for return by post, fax or email (taking about 15 minutes to complete), or
- A telephone interview (about 10 minutes), or
- A face to face meeting at your office (about 20 minutes), or at our Central London office if you prefer.

The attached Response Sheet explains what to do when you have chosen how you want to give your views.

What are we trying to find out: At this stage, we are seeking the views of community organisations such as yours, rather than the service users they work with. We want to know

1. How community organisations might support people marginalised by society, to make choices in the NHS.
2. How these organisations might give a real say in the NHS, to those they support in choice
3. What help organisations would need to take on one or both of these roles.

How we will use what you tell us and keep you informed: if you opt for a telephone survey or face to face interview, we will send you our record of what you told us within a few days, as we did with *Taking Soundings*. We will collate what the all the community organisations tell us and build it into a Report by IPPR, aimed at influencing the government on this issue. We will provide you with a summary of the consultation findings and, with your permission, we will acknowledge your organisation in the final ippr report.

Yours sincerely

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BACKGROUND TO EQUITABLE CHOICE

CHANGES SO FAR: The government is reforming the NHS to give patients more say about where they go for treatment. By the end of 2005, all patients who are referred to hospital by their GP will be offered a choice of four or five different hospitals, and will be able to book an appointment at a time to suit them.

CHANGES IN THE FUTURE: The government is also thinking about whether patients could be offered choices in other areas of health care. For example being able to choose your GP surgery, your actual GP or other health professional (such as a nurse or therapist). Choices might be offered about what kind of treatment you prefer to treat a condition, for example an operation, drugs or other different therapies.

BARRIERS TO CHOICE: For some patients these choices will be easy to make by discussing the options with their doctor, family, other organisations and using the internet or the library to find information about the best choices for them. Other patients may find the process of making choices more difficult. This may be due to a number of factors, including:

- Language, literacy, IT skills barriers
- Lack of knowledge of health services, hospitals and options for specific conditions
- Information and practical arrangements including transport and visiting

We think it is important that everyone has the opportunity, if possible, to make choices about where, when and how they are treated at all stages of health care. This could give people more control in their lives and ensure that they get the best services for them.

MAKING THE NHS BETTER THROUGH CHOICE: It is important that the NHS understands what matters to patients and why, through the choices they make. Over time this will help the NHS as a whole to understand and provide the kind of services people want, using choice to drive up quality of care for all patients.

THIS CONSULTATION aims to find out how community organisations could play a role in

- supporting patients who face barriers to choice, to make the best choices for them, and
- feeding patients' preferences and experiences back to the NHS to help improve its services.

We are considering three types of choices in this consultation: choice of hospital, choice of services outside hospital (primary care) and choice of treatments.

Why might community organisations perform these roles?

During *Taking Soundings*, some participants said that they would like support in making choices from community groups they already know. We want to explore this further.

Relationships and trust: Patients may want information and support to make choices from a range of sources including community organisations. Some groups find it harder to access public services and can get lost in the system. Where "hard to reach" people already have a relationship with a community organisation they may prefer to talk to staff and volunteers who know them and understand their needs.

Expertise and experience: Community and patient support groups have expertise in working with particular client groups, and may also know about local health services. They may be able to take into account the social and cultural needs of the people they work with, which they understand better than NHS staff.

Independence and fairness: Voluntary sector groups are independent of government and the NHS. They are uniquely placed to provide independent advice and advocacy for the people with whom they work, acting as a channel of influence to redress the unequal treatment that disadvantaged groups sometimes receive.

We would be grateful if you would answer the questions on these themes, starting on the next page.

SECTION A – QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR ORGANISATION

1. Your Organisation's Name...

Address

Contact details of the person completing this form

Name.....

Job Title.....**Telephone**

Email address

2. The client group with whom you work (please specify all if more than one)

.....

3. The geographical area(s) that you cover

4. What, if any, advice and support do you provide on health issues?

5. What, if any, advice and support do you provide about quality of hospitals?

6. What, if any, advice and support do you provide about primary care?

SECTION B – SUPPORT IN CHOOSING A HOSPITAL

7. If you had the resources, would your organisation be interested in doing more to support clients in choosing a hospital (e.g. support on comparing hospitals)?

Yes No *Please tick as appropriate*

8. If you have answered 'No', please explain why

9. If you have answered 'Yes', please describe the support you might provide in

- a) understanding the choices available
- b) understand the consequences of making choices and
- c) accessing information to make the choice

a)

b)

c)

10. Do you have any other ideas about how your clients could be supported in choosing a hospital?

SECTION C – CHOICE IN PRIMARY CARE

11. What type of choices in primary care would be useful for the client group whom you support (e.g. being able to choose a GP)?

12. Subject to resources, would your organisation be interested in supporting your clients to make choices in primary care (e.g. providing information on local practices).

Yes **No** *Please tick as appropriate*

13. If you have answered 'No', please explain why

14. If you have answered 'Yes', please describe the support you might provide

15. Please explain any other ways in which your clients could be supported in choices in primary care?

SECTION C –WHAT YOU MIGHT NEED TO PROVIDE SUPPORT

16.

a) What would be the barriers to your organisation providing this support?

b) How might these barriers be overcome?

17. Any general comments about choice or support for choice for your clients?

SECTION C – INFLUENCING THE NHS TO IMPROVE HEALTH SERVICES

18. What kind of involvement does your organisation currently have with the NHS (e.g. involvement in Patients' Forums or policy groups)?

19. If your organisation has been able to bring about improvements in local health services, please describe how you have done so, with examples.

20. a) Could your role in supporting individual patients in making choices help you influence local health services to meet client preferences and improve their experiences?

Yes No *Please tick as appropriate*

b) What would need to happen for this to be effective?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME IN COMPLETING THIS FORM. WE WILL SEND YOU A SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS