



Health Committee

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From Rt Hon Stephen Dorrell MP, Chair

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health
Department of Health
Richmond House
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14 February 2014

At its meeting on 11 February, the Health Committee discussed reports that NHS England invited a patient support group to contribute to a review of specialised commissioning despite knowing that funding for the group comes entirely from the pharmaceutical industry and that it is supported administratively by a well-known lobbyist.

NHS England has said that the document is a factual report of a so-called 'engagement event' designed to gather views about the outline principles for a commissioning strategy and that no money was paid to the support group (the Specialised Healthcare Alliance). The concern is, however, that industry interest groups are able to have an influence over NHS policy development which may be to their commercial advantage.

I would be grateful if you could tell the Committee whether you consider it appropriate that a lobbying organisation has prepared a document on behalf of NHS England, and whether you will discuss this issue with NHS England to ensure that it is not unduly influenced by commercial interests such as pharmaceutical companies and that its dealings with commercial organisations are transparent.

Rt Hon Stephen Dorrell MP
Chair of the Committee



Department
of Health

From the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health

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The Rt Hon Stephen Dorrell MP
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28 FEB 2014

Dear Stephen

Thank you for your letter of 14 February which outlined the Health Committees concerns around the Specialised Healthcare Alliance's involvement with NHS England.

You will already know that as part of the process of engagement to support the development of its strategy for specialised commissioning, NHS England asked the Specialised Healthcare Alliance (SHCA) and Rare Disease UK to provide administrative support for one of the 17 stakeholder engagements events to support the development of the strategy.

This support in practice involved receiving and collating the written responses, and recording the feedback from the event. This factual information was used by NHS England to draft the "Stakeholder engagement report to inform the developing scope of the five-year strategy for specialised services 2014-15 -2018/19", which was agreed in partnership with SHCA. A copy of this report can be found through this link <http://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/stake-engage-rep-0114.pdf>).

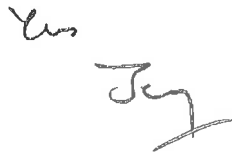
This report will feed into a draft strategy which NHS England is planning to launch a consultation on in late spring with the aim of a final strategy being produced in July 2014. Both the draft and the final strategy will be published and widely consulted on with all stakeholders.

The SCHA did not provide advice on any individual treatment and were not consulted on any spending decisions.

I am aware that NHS England works with and involves the SHCA and Rare Disease UK as umbrella bodies that represent the interests and views of specialist and rare condition charities. They are therefore an important route to involving people who are most impacted by specialist services commissioning. The charities which the SHCA and Rare Disease UK represent are regulated by the Charity Commission who is responsible for their activities under the Charities Act requirements.

Decisions about where NHS England will spend the Specialised Commissioning budget are governed by the Clinical Priorities Advisory Group and the Directly Commissioned Services Committee. NHS England requires all members of all of its committees to declare their interests, and any conflicts are managed "in accordance with our Standards of Business Conduct". Members are also asked to declare any relevant interest at the start of each meeting, and that where conflicts are identified, they would be recused from the relevant discussion. Standards of business conduct apply to anyone working on NHS England's behalf, which includes all committee members, not just NHS England staff.

NHS England have provided assurance that the engagement of the Specialised Healthcare Alliance was appropriate in this event and that decisions are in no way influenced by commercial interests. I am likewise assured that their dealings with commercial organisations are transparent.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Hunt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JEREMY HUNT