Meg Hillier, MP  
Chair  
Committee of Public Accounts  
House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA  
By email

Copy: Dr Sarah Wollaston, MP  
Chair, Health and Social Care Select Committee  
By email

1st February 2019

Dear Ms Hillier

Investigation into the Management of Health Screening

I am writing following the publication today by the National Audit Office\(^1\) of their investigation into the Management of Health Screening.

Screening is a public health function, commissioned by NHS England, and which is of major population significance. Where it has been done well, it has been instrumental in saving tens of thousands of lives from cancer.

For screening to be done well, there are a significant number of fundamental processes which need to be in place. From increasing uptake of screening to ensuring the process of delivering it, and checking that screening results are correct and quality assured, this process is vital and has to be managed well.

There are two significant consequences of not getting these crucial processes right. The first is that inequalities increase. Uptake in screening is worst among poorest communities and those who experience greater inequalities. They are also the communities at greatest risk of cancer. Poorly performing screening services increases their risk and vulnerability.

The second consequence is that people get incorrect results. In a worst-case scenario this may mean some people are given incorrect diagnoses and may be pathwayed into treatment later than they should be, or are put to avoidable distress. Time, cost and energy then has to be spent doing extensive lookback investigation exercises to check through these, with significant distress and expense to those recalled for further tests.

While NHS England is responsible for the commissioning and implementation of national screening, Directors of Public Health are required to be informed and assured that the arrangements properly meet the needs of the local population.

As the representative body for Directors of Public Health, the Association of Directors of Public Health is of the view that this report demonstrates unacceptable failure in a crucial public health service. Not only does this raise the issue of whether public monies spent on screening are being spent effectively, but the current performance is at risk of creating significant avoidable cost in treatment costs, investigations and potential litigation.

We believe that the Committee should investigate this as a matter of urgency, and would be happy to provide evidence.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jeanelle de Gruchy
President, Association of Directors of Public Health