

From the President
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15 November

The Rt Hon Andrew Lansley CBE MP
Secretary of State for Health
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
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Dear Andrew,

The Academy of Medical Sciences welcomes the value that the Government has placed on public health and the increased emphasis on research, analysis and evaluation outlined in 'Equity and excellence: Liberating the NHS'. I write to stress the importance of ensuring an evidence-based approach to new public health initiatives and to highlight the expertise in this field that exists within the Academy of Medical Sciences Fellowship, which I would be happy to put at your disposal.

As you know, the UK faces major health challenges in the future and many of these can only be fully addressed through public health measures. Research in this field helps to understand the complexities of health determinants and to identify potential health interventions. Given the importance of public health and the high cost of many initiatives, it is essential that public health policies are supported by evidence-based decision-making and that where existing evidence is limited, vigorous piloting is integrated into the implementation of new policies and practice. Further, since even well-evidenced policy changes may not bring about the expected benefits, it is crucial that changes be introduced in a manner that allows rigorous evaluation. The Academy hopes to see evidence-based decision-making, robust piloting and rigorous evaluation prioritised in the forthcoming Public Health White Paper.

Our 'Vision for medical science' raised concerns that public health research and delivery are hindered by fragmented responsibility and oversight. It is vital that public health does not become divorced from the medical research sector if it is devolved to local authorities. Scientists have a vital role to play in providing and interpreting evidence. The diverse expertise within the Academy's Fellowship includes leading authorities in public health, preventative measures, health inequalities and health interventions including behavioural sciences and epidemiology. They would be happy to provide advice on topics relevant to the development and implementation of public health policies. I would gladly arrange a roundtable for yourself and key staff developing the White Paper with some of our Fellows. The UK is already a world leader in public health research and the translation to practice. There are great opportunities to strengthen this leadership through innovations that improve health in the community.

If you have any further queries on this matter please do not hesitate to contact me via Catherine Luckin at the Academy Office (tel: 020 3176 2166, e-mail: catherine.luckin@acmedsci.ac.uk).

Best wishes
John

Cc.
The Health White Paper Team