



***Choosing Health?* A consultation on action to improve people's Health. A response from the Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association.**

The Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association welcomes the opportunity to comment on *Choosing Health*. The CPHVA is the UK professional body that represents registered nurses and health visitors who work in a primary or community health setting. The CPHVA is a professional section of Amicus trade union. With over 20,000 members, it is the third largest professional union and is the only one with public health as its foundation.

The CPHVA welcomes the government's intention of a new White Paper as this demonstrates the government's sustained commitment to public health and tackling health inequalities. However the CPHVA is concerned that the focus of *Choosing Health* is reverting to an approach on individuals, which is a move away from the broad, cross – governmental approach of '*Tackling Health Inequalities: A Programme for Action*'. Evidence to date and the recommendation in Donald Acheson's report were that multi-faceted approaches to public health are more effective than single interventions.

The CPHVA feels the document has taken a rather dictatorial approach with no real sense of a partnership approach.

The CPHVA would also like to see more emphasis placed on mental health as mental health impacts on many other health problems, including obesity. The document has highlighted the impact of sick leave on the economy. A high level of sickness absence today is as a result of work related stress. Work related stress is a key issue that should receive more attention. If people feel good about themselves, this affects an individual's ability to make healthier choices.

The CPHVA, recognises the need for better information for individuals in order to inform choice, and that this could be provided through telephone helplines and NHS Direct. However, the CPHVA has some concerns about ensuring universal accessibility for such groups as, for those where English is not the first language, people with learning disabilities, older people and the young.

Smoking

The Health Development Agency has recently published its report on reviews on smoking prevention and cessation strategies, which demonstrate the effectiveness of multi-component approaches. The importance of the social environment and social learning theory in preventing the initiation of smoking in young people was highlighted in the review. The CPHVA hopes that good initiatives that have already commenced will be sustained. In addition, the CPHVA would wish to see the government following the example already shown by Ireland and Norway in imposing workplace bans on smoking.

Healthy Eating

The CPHVA would like to see the government taking a much more proactive stance in relation to food advertising directed at children and young people. A variety of actions are necessary to address areas such as, media advertising linked to celebrities - potato crisps and educational resources. While we acknowledge that no 'one country ban' on advertising is likely to be completely effective, we feel strongly that a stand should be made as an example for others to follow. The issue of obesity in children is of enormous concern to all and without action on all fronts we will continue to send mixed messages to children.

Leisure and Physical Activity

There seems to be growing inequalities in access to leisure and physical activity facilities. While there has been an enormous development of costly, 'high tech' sport and leisure clubs within the private sector, there has been a reduction in local authority run facilities and playground space in schools which has continued under the present government. Improving access for all must be a priority and not just for those who can afford to pay.

The government's Extended Schools initiative would be an ideal way of providing access to sports and leisure facilities to local communities. But here again, there is caution as the likelihood is that schools in more leafy, affluent areas will have greater facilities over schools in deprived inner city areas.

The issue of access to leisure and physical activity facilities is not just about the ability to pay, but is also about being inclusive of age, ability and culture. In and outdoor space for physical activity should be safe, local and affordable.

Leisure facilities and workplace provision for physical activity should be recognised as an occupational health need and not purely as a 'perk'. The NHS being the largest employer in Europe should take the lead in ensuring available access for all staff.

Ensuring change happens

In the setting of objectives and targets the CPHVA asks that these are realistic and not ones that confuse or narrow the focus of holistic and far reaching effects of positive health change. Community development can be a slow process; people's attitudes and lifestyle changes can take years to effect. Changing targets or providing strategies and services for short-term projects are not enough. Often these are confusing or ineffective because just as they become accepted and used, their funding ends. Services should evolve, rather than feel the need to constantly make radical changes.

The CPHVA feels there is a need for more recognition and value to be given to the work of health visitors and school nurses within community development. Health visitors have always worked in the community, developing innovative practice and working to the same aims and philosophy as Sure Start, but without the resources and recognition that is being afforded the Sure Start initiatives. Health visitors and school nurses are ideally placed to work with children and families at a local level and should be key players in any community development work.

Sure Start has undoubtedly had a positive impact in communities. However, the CPHVA has ongoing concerns that this model has created a two-tier approach to service delivery that will only sustain health inequalities. Sure Start schemes can provide much of the evidence of what can be achieved and how to do it. The CPHVA would like to see schemes brought into the mainstream and further developed to address the needs of others in the community, such as older people.

The CPHVA believes that the government should use media to emphasise diet and other health messages. This would counter some of the controversial health claims put forward by commercial food companies.

The CPHVA also feels that there should be more emphasis on sustainability. Practitioners are currently struggling with the plethora of policy initiatives, many of which are still based on short term funding, and little attention is being paid to cohesive, delivery frameworks.

Should you have any questions or need further clarification on points raised, please contact Pat Jackson, Professional Officer, School Health and Public Health, CPHVA Tel: 020 7939 7000. Pat.jackson@amicustheunion.org.

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