



30 March 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

The health and care system in England still fails to fully meet the needs of people with mental health conditions. We recognise that considerable steps have been taken to address bias against mental health provision in this country, and we welcomed your recent comment in the House of Commons confirming that the 'government are committed to seeing mental health treated on a par with physical health'.

However, we believe there is a risk that the government's NHS white paper may lead to a system which continues to undervalue mental health services and underestimates the importance of good mental health on our society.

The proposals set out to 'ensure a system which is more accountable and responsible to the people who work in it and the people who use it'. Yet, the paper suggests that for the key decision-making body for an NHS integrated care system (ICS), membership by representatives of mental health is an optional and not mandated.

Whilst we hope that ICSs will understand the necessity of including mental health, the current proposals do not put mental health on an equal footing and there is a risk that some ICSs will not include representatives from mental health services at the top table.

We believe this would be a considerable step backwards for the parity of esteem for people who use mental health services locally and nationally who deserve equal access to the most effective and safest care and treatment.

Optional mental health representation at this level poses additional risk of distorting the distribution of resources for mental health care providers. It is apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic impact have negatively affected many people's mental health and formed additional barriers for people already suffering from mental illness. It is widely accepted that the pandemic has severely impacted the mental health of young people in this country. Our system must be equipped to support individuals, families and communities who have been affected further in this way - whether through bereavement, financial loss or the impact of isolation. We owe it to our society to ensure mental health services are represented in rooms where decisions are made.

We are also concerned that neglecting to mandate mental health representation on a unitary board will set back the progress of our organisations working with third and independent sector partners, who will have a vital role in supporting recovery post pandemic.

If this matter is not addressed, we fear headway made within the system to address parity over the last decade will be undermined. We must be certain mental health representation in these settings is guaranteed to influence the allocation of economic resource our organisations require to continue to provide quality care for people who use our services. We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

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Andy Willis, Dorset Healthcare University NHS Foundation Trust & Devon Partnership NHS Trust

Angela Monaghan, South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
Ann Beasley, South West London & St George's Mental Health NHS Trust
Beatrice Fraenkel, Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust
Caroline Maley, Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Charlotte Hitchings, Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust
Chris Burdon, Worcestershire Health & Care NHS Trust
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Sir Norman Lamb, South London & Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust
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