



South Central

The Right Honourable
David Cameron MP
Suite 1 Waterloo House
58-60 High Street
Witney
OX28 6HJ

South Central Strategic Health Authority
First Floor, Rivergate House
Newbury Business Park
London Road, Newbury
Berkshire, RG14 2PZ

01635 275500
www.southcentral.nhs.uk

8 August 2011

Dear David,

Andrew Lansley wrote to you on 14 June about the employment of nurses at Chipping Norton Hospital, in which he said he had asked me to write to you. Unfortunately his letter was not copied to me at the time and I was unaware of his request until recently.

Since then, Andrea Young, my Chief Executive at the SHA, and Olga Senior, Director of Communications & Corporate Affairs have reviewed the matters raised in the Secretary of State's letter with the Chief Executives of Oxfordshire PCT, the service commissioner, and Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, the provider of community services in Oxfordshire of which Chipping Norton Hospital is a part. The Chief Executives have agreed a series of actions to address the anxieties of local residents about the future of the hospital.

Nurses at Chipping Norton Hospital are currently employed by the NHS. Under the terms of the contract with the Order of St. John, nurses working at the hospital would continue to be employed by the NHS for a period of three years. Thereafter, nurses retiring from, or leaving the hospital would be replaced by nurses employed by the Order of St John.

As you will know, local residents are concerned that the replacement of NHS nurses with nurses from the Order of St John highlights a change in status of the hospital and a diminution of the range and quality of care provided there.

The employment of staff at Chipping Norton Hospital remains complex. At present, all nurses are employed by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust. This follows implementation of the Transforming Community Services policy, under which PCTs were required to devolve their community services. Day-to-day clinical management of the nursing staff is provided by the Order of St John. I understand from the enquiries I have made that this arrangement is working effectively and that patients are being cared for safely and well.

The contract with the Order of St John is comprehensive and is being carefully managed. Changes to the terms of the agreement that, after three years, nurses retiring from, or leaving the hospital would be replaced by nurses employed by the Order of St John, rather than the NHS, would result in substantially increased costs that would need to be found from elsewhere within the Oxfordshire NHS budget, and would seriously compromise the efficiency of the hospital.

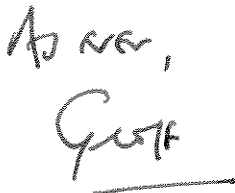
Towards a healthier future...

It is essential that local residents are reassured about the safety, quality and efficiency of the services provided at Chipping Norton Hospital. Accordingly, Andrea has agreed with the Chief Executives of Oxfordshire PCT and Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust that they will work with the Order of St John to ensure that, by the end of August, all remaining issues about the practicalities of the management of the services in Chipping Norton are resolved and that the outcome is communicated, promptly and fully, to local residents and stakeholders.

You will understand that my primary focus, as that of the SHA, is to assure the safety, quality and sustainability of the health services provided to the local population. To this end, Andrea and her team, together with the Chief Executives of Oxfordshire PCT and Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, will also work with the emerging clinical commissioning group (CCG) that will, subject to legislation, be responsible for commissioning services for the Chipping Norton area by 2013. Their purpose will be to ensure that the CCG is fully aware of the importance of Chipping Norton Hospital, and continues to commission a range of safe, high quality services appropriate to the needs of the local community.

All concerned are also mindful of Government policy on enabling any qualified provider to compete on quality to provide services to the NHS and of the need to ensure that services remain safe and of high quality as well as clinically relevant and deliverable from within available resources. A great deal of work is going on to ensure that this is the case for all patients using Chipping Norton Hospital.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr Harris', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Geoffrey Harris
Chairman