

Below is an extract from a letter that appeared in The Guardian on the 28 April 2010

Wednesday, 28 April 2010

NHS change must be driven by clinical evidence

Letter

There has been a wealth of clinical evidence for many years that specialist clinical services, such as stroke, trauma and heart surgery, should be concentrated in fewer centres. This would allow the latest equipment to be sited with a critical mass of expert clinicians who regularly manage these challenging clinical problems, and are backed by the most up-to-date research. The greater volumes of patients mean doctors are better at spotting problems and treating them quickly. Survival and recovery rates would improve markedly with many lives

saved. As techniques and technology have developed over recent years, speciality rather than proximity has become the key for patient safety. So increased patient safety and improved care must be the major drivers of any reconfiguration.

Patients may indeed have to travel further for some specialist care, but if it is significantly better care then we believe that centralisation is justified. However, at the same time there is also strong evidence to support a large amount of more routine care, currently taking place in hospitals, being carried out closer to where patients live in the community with GPs playing a crucial role in the delivery of services.

Delivering this requires strong leadership and brave decision-making

from doctors, managers and politicians. Simply condemning change as bad and defending the status quo as ideal is not serving the interests of patients.

Signed by all the Presidents of the following organisations at the time: *Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, Royal College of Physicians, Royal College General Practitioners, NHS Confederation, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health, Royal College of Psychiatrists, Royal College of Anaesthetists, Royal College of Radiologists, Royal College of Ophthalmologists, Faculty of Public Health Medicine, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine, Faculty of Occupational Health*