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Dear Alastair

Thank you for your letter of 27 July, which raised a number of issues about the future commissioning of specialised services. I apologise for the delay in replying.

I can confirm that there will be a clear focus on specialised services in the NHS Commissioning Board (NHS CB). Whilst it will be a core component of the NHS CB and therefore integrated into all directorates of the NHS CB, it will also be a clearly identified function with both national and sub-national delivery arrangements.

One of the eight national executive directors of the NHS CB will be identified as the 'lead' for specialised services. To support them in this work, we are planning to establish a national specialised service team which will develop all strategy, nationally plan and specify services, nationally develop quality standards and work with patient and clinicians to develop outcome measures. This team will be fully integrated into the NHS CB and will specifically provide an integrated operating model for the commissioning of specialised services. It will develop links with the NHS CB's corporate strategy and innovation functions, and will ensure that convergence and equity of access for specialised services develops over time. In my view, this team will have local delivery mechanisms based in each of the four NHS CB sectors underpinned by local arrangements for engagement with patient groups, clinicians and clinical commissioning groups. This model will take the very best of current specialised commissioning arrangements but will ensure that for the first time there is one national strategy across the range of specialised conditions.

To provide further assurance during the period of transition, the governance arrangements for developing the proposals for specialised commissioning will continue to be overseen by the Transitional Oversight Group. This group will ensure that the convergence of specialised services to one national operating model continues through transition.

The options around allocations to clinical commissioning groups are still being worked through.

Initially, we need to determine the appropriate level of funding for specialised services. This is being done with the current commissioners of specialised services based on the actual spend for services. This work will progress over the next two years so that by the time the NHS CB is fully operational in 2013/14, we will have moved from historic budgets set on local access criteria to a national budget.

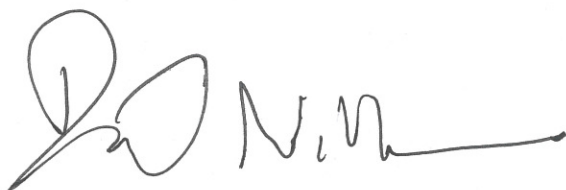
The National Quality Board has just begun an engagement exercise on a proposed library of Quality Standards. The engagement exercise is being hosted by NICE on its website at:

<http://www.nice.org.uk/getinvolved/currentniceconsultations/NQBEngagement.jsp>

I would wish to encourage you to participate in this exercise. The process will need to take into consideration services for people with rare conditions.

In the interim, quality dashboards are being developed for specialised services and Ann Jarvis Director of South West SCG is leading this work nationally. A significant amount of work is taking place to develop service specifications and policies for access to services for inclusion in contracts. Clearly, this will have to be an incremental process because of the number of services that form part of the Specialised Services National Definition Set (SSNDS) but we are aiming for the vast majority of the SSNDS to be specified and commissioned through national policies by 1st April 2013. This will become a major piece of work through the rest of 2011/12 and 2012/13.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Nicholson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Sir David Nicholson KCB CBE
NHS Chief Executive**