

NEWS RELEASE FROM THE
REGISTERED NURSING HOME ASSOCIATION

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**NURSING HOMES COULD PLAY MAJOR ROLE
IN SWITCH FROM HOSPITAL TO COMMUNITY CARE**

The UK's 4,400 nursing homes could have a major role to play in bringing services out of acute hospitals and into the community, it was claimed today.

Responding to the Government's new white paper setting out a vision for reducing reliance on hospital-based care, the Registered Nursing Home Association (RNHA) said the potential of nursing homes to help strengthen community services for older people must not be overlooked, either by the government or by nursing home operators themselves.

In a statement today the RNHA said the nursing home sector represented the single most significant concentration of expertise in the care of older people in the country, with thousands of qualified nurses caring for over 150,000 patients.

The knowledge and understanding of this key area of health care, said the association, was invaluable to any national strategy aimed at keeping people out of hospital. Their nurses and their facilities could be utilised to move services out of the acute setting and into the community.

RNHA chief executive officer, Frank Ursell, said community health clinics, out-patient services and rehabilitation centres could all be run from nursing homes, or local clusters of nursing homes, if their facilities were appropriately expanded and adapted and if there was closer collaboration between the NHS and non-NHS health care providers.

Said Mr Ursell: "If the government means what it says in the white paper, then we welcome the opportunities apparently being offered to develop a more mixed economy, with the independent and voluntary sectors providing some services for NHS patients."

He added: "The nursing home of today could, in such a scenario, develop within the next ten years into a provider of a wide range of community health and primary care services targeted at older people and others with long-term conditions. It is a scenario that we should be exploring with national and local policy-makers.

"Nor is there any reason why an NHS-employed nurse specialist in asthma, arthritis, diabetes or coronary obstructive pulmonary disease should not be based in a community nursing home or why a consultant orthopaedic surgeon should not hold out-patient sessions there."

Whilst reacting positively to this aspect of the white paper, the RNHA warns that the government's track record on partnership and diversification in health care is somewhat chequered.

"There have been many false dawns in the past," said Mr Ursell. "All too often the contribution already made by nursing homes is overlooked completely, let alone the idea that their collective expertise might be harnessed by the NHS."

The RNHA also expressed disappointment that the white paper had skated over the needs of the those older people whose condition deteriorated beyond the point where they could be safely and effectively cared for in their own homes.

Commented Mr Ursell: "Whilst it is right to put a greater focus on prevention and maintaining independence as far as possible, the point is reached with thousands of older people each year where their condition demands 24-hour specialist care in a residential nursing home setting.

"To a certain extent, the government has side-stepped the issue in the white paper by saying that a future policy statement is being prepared by the national clinical director for older people. We very much hope that, when this paper is published, it will acknowledge the critical importance of ensuring that our frailest and most vulnerable older people are properly cared for in nursing homes and residential care homes that are adequately funded for the delivery of consistently high standards of care."

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Notes to editors:

1. The RNHA is the only organisation in the UK which exclusively represents nursing home providers.
2. *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say – a new direction for community services* is the title of the white paper published by the Department of Health to look at a new strategy for providing more services out of hospital and in community and primary care settings.

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