

NEWS RELEASE FROM
THE REGISTERED NURSING HOME ASSOCIATION

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**OLDER PEOPLE NEED A CARE SYSTEM THAT IS
NEEDS-LED RATHER THAN FINANCE-LED –
*RNHA VERDICT ON THE WANLESS REPORT ON
SOCIAL CARE FUNDING***

The Registered Nursing Home Association (RNHA) has welcomed the conclusion of the Wanless report on the future funding of social care for older people that extra money will be needed over the next 20 years to meet rising needs.

The RNHA also strongly supports the report's recommendations that where an individual's primary needs are *health* needs, the NHS should cover the costs of long-term care, and that for individuals who require mainly social care there should be an end to the existing postcode lotteries which result from the application of different eligibility criteria by different local authorities.

"It is good to see that Sir Derek's direction of travel is away from today's unfair, means-tested system," said RNHA chief executive officer Frank Ursell. "But for patients in nursing homes the ultimate crunch will be how the government defines what is nursing or health care and what is social care."

He added: "We believe that up to now the definition of nursing care has been too narrow, thereby disqualifying many older people from full NHS funding of their costs. We believe that this is the result of an artificial and arbitrary system designed deliberately to keep NHS costs down rather than to meet the needs of older people. So we are looking to the government to put things right in the future."

Conscious that older people's care costs may currently be met or contributed towards from completely separate NHS and social services budgets, the RNHA says it would like to see a more joined up approach, making the earlier promises of pooled resources a reality.

In assessing the potential impact of the Wanless report, the RNHA does not agree with its apparent assumption that there is too much focus in the current system on those older people with the greatest needs. Said Mr Ursell: "Surely no one could argue that less attention is paid in future to those who have multiple health and social care problems."

The RNHA is also questioning the assertion in the document that there are currently too many older people in care homes. "This is an unproven assumption," said Mr Ursell. "The people cared for in nursing homes today are invariably those who, 25 years ago, would have been in a long-stay NHS hospital specialising in the care of older people. As a result, the level of health dependency of the average patient in a modern nursing home is significantly higher than it used to be."

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On the specific issue of Wanless report's proposal to switch from a means-tested basis of social care to what the report describes as a 'partnership model', the RNHA will need further time to consider the relative merits and demerits of the suggested system.

Commented Mr Ursell: "At face value, it would seem not to be as crude and unfair as the current system, but we need to look more closely at the small print. What we can say at this stage is that older people deserve a system that is based on a careful assessment of their individual needs rather than the size of their wallets. We think that the report recognises this and we hope that in the future this country will see a system that is needs-led rather than finance-led."

In addition, the RNHA also wants to see a less bureaucratic, fragmented system and a move towards greater collaboration between the NHS and social services in assessing and meeting individuals' health and social care needs.

"There are too many barriers and hurdles built in to the current system," said Mr Ursell. "For older people, obtaining their entitlements is really a great trial. It should really be a smooth and straightforward process. That is what we should be moving towards."

In its formal response to the Wanless report, the RNHA will be seeking to clarify whether Sir Derek's calculations for future expenditure are based on an assumption that labour costs in social care will remain broadly at their current levels for several years to come.

"Does Wanless assume that our workforce will remain relatively low paid for the foreseeable future," said Mr Ursell, "or does it anticipate a swift transition to a better trained, better paid workforce? It is only through the latter approach that we are likely to see a major improvement in the quality of outcomes of care, but it will require a firm commitment to significantly higher levels of investment."

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Notes to editors:

1. The report of the Wanless Social Care Review, *Securing Good Care for Older People*, was published by the King's Fund on 30th March 2006. The review team, led by Sir Derek Wanless, considered future funding requirements, ways of improving care outcomes, and whether there is a fairer and more cost-effective way of funding social care than the current means tested system.
2. The Registered Nursing Home Association represents over 1,200 nursing homes across the UK.

For further information please contact Frank Ursell, Chief Executive Officer,
Registered Nursing Home Association Tel: 0121 454 2511 or 07785 227000