



News Release

15th November 2005

Community Hospitals under threat - CHANT raises awareness

Around eighty people, including twenty Members of Parliament, witnessed the official launch today in the House of Commons of CHANT (Community Hospitals Acting Nationally Together), a cross-party campaign group set-up to lobby Ministers, and raise awareness of the nation-wide threat to local community hospitals.

Doctors, nurses, councillors, and community leaders from across the country, descended on Committee Room 10 to hear Graham Stuart, Member of Parliament for Beverley and Holderness, and Chairman of CHANT, outline his plans to hold Ministers to account for the damaging cuts and closures currently afflicting primary health care.

Graham, who has two community hospitals in his constituency under threat, told the committee room how Government policy, coupled with financial mismanagement in the NHS, had left local Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) facing record deficits, and up to 90 community hospitals under threat of closure.

Graham said, "The launch of CHANT will send a very clear message to Ministers that there is widespread cross-party

condemnation of the Government's actions in relation to community hospitals. Ministers must start to find answers to this growing crisis. They have admitted that there is universal support for 'care closer to home.' Their election manifesto pledged to develop a new generation of community hospitals. Why then, are we seeing the same pattern of cuts, closures and centralisation across the country?"

Boris Johnson, Member of Parliament for Henley, and Vice-Chairman of CHANT, said, "This is an issue of democracy and accountability. The local PCTs are not elected by anyone. The public cannot lay a finger on them. When the anger turns to the Government, however, they coolly hold up their hands and say, 'nothing to do with us.'

"This is unacceptable. It is Government policy that dictates how much money the PCTs have to spend and exactly how that money is spent. It must not be allowed to pass the buck any longer. The launch of CHANT will see to this."

Notes to Editors:

CHANT has recently launched its website www.chantonline.com

As part of the campaign to save community hospitals, it was agreed that a protest march would be organised in London to demonstrate to Ministers the level of public anger. A Steering Group will be appointed to oversee the event, which is likely to be held at the beginning of next year.

Graham Stuart MP introduced a debate on community hospitals in Westminster Hall on 2 November 2005. You can access the debate at www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/graham_stuart/beverley_and_holderness

For further information on CHANT please ring Rachel Barson on 01482 679687