

NEWS RELEASE

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Minister spells out vision of mutual NHS

Following Alan Milburn's announcement last month that the public would be given a key role in the management - and become the owners - of NHS Foundation Trusts, Health Minister Hazel Blears has indicated that the Government is committed to extending mutual ownership across the NHS.

Writing in the Mutuo pamphlet ***Making Healthcare Mutual*** ⁽¹⁾, Blears announced that new governance arrangements for primary care could also be modelled on successful mutual and co-operative organisations, placing ownership in the hands of employees and patients.

Hazel Blears said: "Decades of central State ownership need to be replaced by local public ownership. Foundation Hospitals ⁽²⁾ will only be the start. We need to review how the model of mutualism and co-operation can work in other areas of the health service, including primary care.

"This reform programme is every bit as radical and progressive as that which created the NHS over fifty years ago. It draws on the traditions of social and community ownership that inspired the founders of the NHS, and places a premium on local accountability for local services."

Mutuo's Director Peter Hunt said: "This will be a real and radical exercise in social ownership and the co-operative movement is delighted that the Government has stated its intention to widen the scope of its reforms beyond the idea of Foundation Hospitals and into areas such as Primary Care, where relationships between professionals and patients are often strongest."

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Notes for editors:

1. The pamphlet *Making Healthcare Mutual: a publicly funded, locally accountable NHS* (£10 from e.harrison@mutuo.co.uk) was launched last night at a Friends of the Co-operative Ideal reception at the House of Commons.

Mutuo brings together the different wings of the existing mutual sector to establish new mutual structures for delivering public services that give a voice to users, staff and local communities. It is supported by the Building Societies Association, the Association of Friendly Societies, the Co-operative Bank and the Co-operative Group. It operates as a publisher and researcher for the sector, and during 2002 has been active in developing and promoting mutual models for social housing and childcare.

2. NHS Foundation Trusts will have an organisational structure defined in law as public benefit organisations. A new governance structure will reflect freedom from Whitehall control and give greater accountability to the local community. Within this, NHS Foundation Trusts will have considerable freedom to develop governance arrangements to suit local circumstances. Patient and employee representatives will elect Stakeholder Councils, which will be responsible for ensuring that the Trust operates in the best interests of the community, and will appoint Management Board members.

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