

7 July 1989

E(A): COMMUNITY CARE

The basic approach of Kenneth Clarke's statement on community care is a good one. But I recommend three changes to the draft.

Mentally Ill (paragraph 21 of the Statement)

After the last Ministerial meeting, the care of the mentally ill was the only significant issue still outstanding. Kenneth Clarke and John Major have now agreed a new specific grant to ensure that health authorities will have some influence over the provision of social care by local authorities.

This general approach is reasonable. But I believe we need to clarify two key points before making a public statement:

← First, if the plans of a local authority fall short, could the health authority arrange contracts directly with the voluntary and commercial sectors? In my view, it is essential that we do not entirely block off this route.

← Second, will the medical professionals - notably community psychiatric nurses, GPs and geriatricians - have any influence over the plans and targets? A clear statement would go a long way to diffusing the concerns of the nursing profession (as highlighted in Caroline Cox's recent letter) and others such as Lord Butterfield (see attached letter).

Both these can be dealt with by minor changes to the draft statement.

Recommendations

1. Insert before the last sentence of paragraph 21:

In some cases it may be appropriate for health authorities to arrange contracts directly with the voluntary and commercial sectors.'

2. Change the last sentence of paragraph 21 to read:

'The details of this proposal will be worked out in discussion with health and local authority representatives, including relevant nurse and general practitioner representatives'.

Local Authority 'Inspection and Registration' of Residential Homes (paragraph 22)

Private residential home owners will criticise us heavily for giving local authorities the responsibility for accommodation and care costs without changing the inspection procedures. I therefore believe it is crucial to include a reference to our agreed line, as mentioned in the minutes of the last meeting.

Recommendation

Add the following sentence to paragraph 22 of the statement:

'Local Authorities will be asked to establish inspection and registration units at arm's length from the management of their own services which should be responsible for standards in their homes, and to involve independent outsiders in these arrangements'.

Ia Whitehead

IAN WHITEHEAD