

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE
Chair
Board of the UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
London
SW1V 2QQ

07 April 2014

Dear Sir Andrew

The Board of the UK Statistics Authority and operation of the Health and Social Care Information Centre

We are writing to you in the context of the Board of the UK Statistics Authority's statutory functions under the Statistics Registration and Service Act 2007, and the operation of the Health and Social Care Information Centre which is a producer of official statistics.

As you will be aware, the Centre was re-established under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 with broad powers and duties in relation to the collection, analysis, dissemination and other publication of information relating to health and adult social care. Last December NHS England directed the Centre under The Health and Social Care Information Centre (Establishment of Information Systems for NHS Services: Collection and Analysis of Primary Care Data) Directions 2013 to collect and analyse information about patients from GPs as part of the care.data programme. However, after a successful campaign by medConfidential, NHS England announced in February a six month pause in rolling-out the programme (<http://www.england.nhs.uk/2014/02/19/response-info-share/>). Since then, the government proposed in the House of Commons a number of amendments to the Care Bill, but these were criticised as falling short of being sufficient to restore public trust. We understand the matter will come before the House of Lords on 07 May.

Given the Board's various functions under the 2007 Act – such as monitoring the production and publication of official statistics, and promoting standards – and its statutory objective of promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good, it seems to us that the Board has an important and trusted role to play in this situation. In particular, it appears to be well placed to help ensure that the public goods of patient confidentiality and medical research are both properly respected and acknowledged within the statutory framework governing the Centre and its operation, from the point of view of quality of official statistics (including their impartiality, accuracy and relevance, and coherence with other official statistics), good practice and comprehensiveness. It also seems that the Board's functions in relation to national statistics may also be relevant.

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We would therefore be very grateful if you would consider making a statement of the Board's position in relation to the care.data programme and the Centre, and provide us with copies of any correspondence passing between the Board and the Centre, NHS England and the Department of Health (both ways) since April 2013.

We look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Handwritten signatures of Allyson Pollock and Peter Roderick.

Professor Allyson Pollock FFPH, FRCGP, FRCP(Ed)
Professor of public health research and policy
Co-director, Global Health, Innovation & Policy Unit

Peter Roderick
Senior research fellow

cc Pam Davies
Deputy director, National Statistician's Office