

24 September 2008

Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP
Secretary of State for Health
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS

Dear Secretary of State

**Scientific and technical Information for the NHS & Social Care
in the area of Health Informatics (PACS and related technologies)**

The UK Department of Health and NHS has for many years had access to world class independent scientific and technical advice through its National Technology Evaluation groups. It is no exaggeration to say that the UK has lead the world in the evaluation and coordinated provision of technical expertise in Medical Devices. The scope of the work covers imaging technology, a wide range of general Medical Devices, and a wide range of pathology services (see www.pasa.nhs.uk and find the CEP pages).

These evaluation groups have been run and managed for over 25 years within NHS Hospitals and University Departments, with the funding and responsibilities most recently through the MHRA and now through PASA (Purchasing and Supplies Agency). PASA have created CEP, the Centre for Evidence Based Purchasing, and are focussed on delivering information products to assist the NHS and social care within their areas of responsibility.

This briefing document concerns the PACSnet group, the evaluation group for PACS (Picture Archiving and Communication Systems and related Health Informatics), see www.pacsnet.org.uk . This group has been the leading technical support in the UK in this area, and has played a significant role in the work of the National Programme for IT, and in its successor Connecting for Health (CfH).

Unfortunately the Health Informatics area is not a prime area for CEP, and they do not have enough work in this area to justify funding PACSnet. In view of this PACSnet are under notice of closure in early December 2008. The group is hosted by St George's Hospital, London, who cannot take the business risk on their local funding of providing a National NHS service.

The group is therefore under threat of disbanding, which will result in a loss of skills and experience to the NHS and social care. The loss of this group and the information and expertise it provides will, we believe, be detrimental to services in the NHS relating to Health Informatics. As UK hospitals are now PACS enabled, the significant issues of wider connectivity are still to be dealt with, and Hospitals will benefit from the independent and authoritative advice and guidance that PACSnet can bring to the National implementation of IT solutions.

We propose that the loss of this group, and the support to the NHS IT programme, will be a strategic loss to the NHS and social care, and we request that consideration be given to funding this group within a responsible host organisation. Specifically, this group has expert knowledge of mechanisms which could be adopted to resolve some of the interoperability issues which present some of the greatest challenges to the NHS IT developments being coordinated by CfH.

The timescale set out above, with loss of staff in early December 2008 make this an urgent matter for consideration.

For further details and discussion please contact Dr Alan Britten, Centre Supervisor, Medical Physics and Bioengineering, St George's NHS Trust, Blackshaw Rd, London, SW19 3JA.
Alan.britten@stgeorges.nhs.uk, 020 8725 1536 (mob 0790 583 6543).

We look forward to hearing from you on this important and urgent issue.

Yours sincerely

Dr Stuart Green
President, British Institute of Radiology