



27 January 2012

Dear Colleague

I am writing to update you on this College's actions on the Health and Social Care Bill.

I am sure that you will have seen recent press speculation about the position of the Royal Colleges and you will also know that the health unions, including BMA, RCN and RCM, have recently called for the Health Bill to be withdrawn.

Since the publication of the original Health Bill in the latter part of 2010, this College has had numerous meetings and discussions with the Prime Minister, health ministers, civil servants and advisers, each meeting aimed at improving aspects of the legislation for the delivery of women's health care. When the Prime Minister ordered a pause in the Health Bill to conduct the 'listening exercise', the College worked closely with the Future Forum, and continues to work with Future Forum members in areas of key concern, e.g., integration of services, and education and training. The RCOG's 'High Quality Women's Health Care Report', published last summer, has introduced the concepts of clinical networks of women's health services and the life-course approach to women's health care.

The amendments and clarifications that the RCOG has secured from ministers have improved the Health Bill but the College Council still have significant concerns about aspects of the Bill and wish to see more changes. From meetings with RCOG members throughout the country, I know how much pressure you and your colleagues are under. However, while we work for change during the next stage of the Bill's scrutiny, we do not seek at this late stage withdrawal of the Health Bill. When I spoke this week to Andrew Lansley, Secretary of State for Health, and Lord Howe, Minister of Health in the House of Lords, I emphasised that the College still wishes to see changes to the legislation.

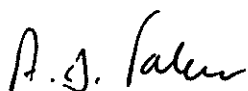
It is a significant concern that, despite Ministers' reassurances, RCOG members report aggressive stances on service cuts and competition, leaving services in some areas dangerously stretched. We are seeking cast-iron safeguards that competition and cost-savings, including the private income cap, will not jeopardise the integration of women's services, standards of care, and equality of access to health care for all. In particular, it is imperative that we are assured that women who are socially disadvantaged and vulnerable will not be put at risk by these changes. We wish to see that (a) the Secretary of State and Ministers remain fully accountable to parliament for the whole NHS; and (b) there is a national clinical director of women's services, accountable to the NHS medical director for the delivery of women's services in England, and representing our specialty on the National Commissioning Board.

We also have significant concerns about the future of education and training of doctors. The Future Forum has made progress but we need reassurance that Ministers will work to ensure that a future high-quality, comprehensive and country-wide system of education and training is secure. Without RCOG involvement in the detailed national development of education and training standards and practice, we risk losing our position as world leaders in the training of medical specialists.

The Secretary of State and Lord Howe have both agreed to meet with the RCOG to discuss these concerns.

The Health and Social Care Bill has had a long passage through Parliament and the amount of consultation during this time has been unprecedented. It is imperative that this College continues to engage with Ministers and their officials, not only to express our concerns and improve plans for the future of the NHS but to highlight current problems in service delivery. Your Council and its Officers will continue to do this to the best of our ability, and if you have examples, suggestions and views that you wish to communicate, I would be very grateful to receive these directly, or through your Council representatives.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. J. Falconer', written in a cursive style.

Dr Anthony Falconer FRCOG
President