



## **Response to National Council for Palliative Care Manifesto**

**14<sup>th</sup> April 2005**

Thank you for sending me the National Council for Palliative Care Manifesto. Liberal Democrats fully endorse the three principles of the Manifesto. Obviously I take a close personal interest in this subject having been an active member of the Health Select Committee inquiry on Palliative Care last year.

Liberal Democrats believe all people should be able to access the care they need both in the management of long-term medical conditions and at the end of life. There is a clear need for improvements to palliative care. Access to this care should not be limited by a person's age, diagnosis, social or ethnic background. However, provision varies very widely at present. Hospice patients are being given a lower priority as a result of the system of fines for delayed transfers of care. Hospices are reporting that social services and community hospitals are prioritising acute hospital patients over hospice patients as a result of the fines. Central guidance and funding focuses very strongly on cancer, but cancer accounts for only a quarter of deaths.

It is important for the government to recognise the wealth of experience and expertise in the voluntary hospice movement as well as in the NHS. Liberal Democrats would develop palliative care through a strong partnership between the NHS, local authorities and the voluntary sector supported by a National Service Framework. Guidance on palliative care services for children and for non-malignant disease should form the next steps forward. Once agreed standards are in place, these would be monitored along with all other performance measures by our proposed new inspectorate covering both health and social care as part of an enhanced Audit Commission.

Increasing resources for palliative care is one of our priorities. We have made a costed manifesto commitment to earmark an additional £100 million pounds above Labour government plans for palliative care over the next Parliament, and obviously we would seek to go beyond this as any new resources became available.

Liberal Democrats also believe that the need for support around the time of death goes much wider than managing the physical and psychological condition of the dying person. In particular, there is a need to support the rest of the family through the weeks and months before and after death. We would therefore draw up a cross-departmental strategy, involving stakeholder organisations from outside Government,

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looking at how we can support people to cope with death and loss more broadly – this is an approach which has been pioneered successfully in Canada.

I very much look forward to continuing to work with the voluntary sector organisations to improve the level of palliative care during the next parliament.

**Paul Burstow**

**Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Health**

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