

The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP  
Secretary of State for Health  
Department of Health  
Richmond House  
79 Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2NS

29 December 2014

Dear Mr Hunt,

I am not sure if you have seen the letter that I sent to you on behalf of the four National User Group chairs on 29 December and to which I have now received a reply from Paul Swiderski. We find the reply a little surprising as the decision on whether a service is centrally or locally procured does not normally seem to depend on the age of the technology. Email continues to be centrally procured despite no longer being a new technology, and this is clearly a correct decision.

By devolving the responsibility for procuring SMS services to practice level, and without any transfer of funding support, NHS England is putting at risk some significant developments in the use of SMS for clinician/patient communication.

There are two over-riding reasons why local procurement for SMS service does not make sense organisationally: the systems with which the SMS provision will need to interface are national not local, and the providers of SMS services are large national companies. This means that devolving the responsibility to a local level will lead to massive inefficiencies in both procurement and implementation at a time when the NHS can ill afford any reduction in efficiency.

There is also the serious risk that practices, contending with a serious squeeze on their own finances will find that SMS contracts cannot be justified against the other uses for the money. As a practice faced with a choice between employing a phlebotomist or sending text messages we would certainly choose the former.

There is also a significant risk with changing suppliers, and the need to re-configure with the changes that patients will experience significant interruptions to services, even where these are being re-procured.

I trust that you will consider this issue personally and look forward to your reply.



Dr Geoff Schrecker

Chair, EMIS National User Group

Also on behalf of:



Ms Kathie Applebee

Chair, National Vision User Group



Dr Avish Punater

Chair, Microtest User Group



Hazel Chappell

SystemOne National User Group Chair