



NHS Management Executive
St. Andrew's House
Edinburgh EH1 3DG

29th August 1997

Dear Colleague

GUIDANCE ON DEVOLUTION REFERENDUM

Summary

1. This letter provides guidance on the conduct of business in the period leading up to the Referendum on Devolution, due to take place on 11 September.

Action

2. Health Board General Managers and Trust Chief Executives should issue prompt guidance, based on this letter, to Chairmen, non-executive appointees and all staff to enable them to take appropriate action.

Yours sincerely

BM GERRY MARR

Addressees

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Health Boards

Chief Executives,
NHS Trusts

General Manager,
Common Services Agency

General Manager,
State Hospitals Board for
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1. Now that the date for a Referendum on a Scottish Parliament has been announced, Health Boards, NHS Trusts and other NHS bodies may be faced with requests for information or views from MPs, representatives of political organisations and the media about the activities of the NHS in Scotland. The Referendum campaign is different from a General Election, in that the Government remains in office whatever the outcome, and all the normal business of Government continues. Nevertheless, during the campaign you must seek to prevent any grounds for complaint about behaviour which is partial to one political party or to one particular viewpoint on devolution.

Dealing with Enquiries

2. Media enquiries and enquiries from representatives of political parties or MPs about the operation of the NHS should be answered by providing factual explanation of current Health Board and Trust policy. Care should be taken not to become involved in a partisan way in devolution issues; and, in particular, Health Boards and Trusts should seek to avoid speculating about the implications of any outcome of the Referendum. They may, however, comment on the Government's policy of making NHS bodies more open and accountable, without offering any view on the merits of different options expressed by others during the campaign. Enquiries about national policy should be referred to the Scottish Office Information Directorate (0131 244 2656).

Conduct of Business of the NHS in Scotland

3. The normal business of the NHS can proceed without interruption during the period leading up to the Referendum.

Correspondence

4. Letters from MPs to Boards should be processed in the usual way.

Visits to NHS Premises

5. Visits to NHS premises by local MPs, politicians and Ministers may proceed as usual. However, Health Boards and Trusts should be aware that such visits could be used for campaigning purposes. The overriding concern should be to avoid disruption to patients' treatment.

Campaigning on NHS Premises

6. Health Boards and Trusts should consider carefully whether to allow:

6.1 Personal canvassing.

6.2 Filming or photography in connection with the campaign on NHS premises.

If they agree to such a request, they must be prepared to offer comparable facilities to any Referendum campaigning group. Posters advocating a particular vote in the Referendum should not be displayed on NHS premises.

Employees of the NHS in Scotland

7. NHS employees are free to engage in public debate or comment during the period leading up to the Referendum and to engage in Referendum campaigning. However, comments should not be made using any information which is not generally available to the public. Official premises and equipment should not be used. Individuals must make clear that their views are their own and do not represent the views of any Health Board, Trust or other NHS body.

Chairmen and Other Non-Executive Appointees

8. Chairmen and non-executives appointed by Scottish Office Ministers are reminded of the terms of their appointment concerning political activity.

Health and Trust board Meetings

9. Health and Trust Board meetings should continue in the normal way.