

View from the House

This week the Health Bill returns to the House of Lords. This is a crucial time when we need to convince the Lords that they must stop this outrageous privatisation and unnecessary reorganisation of the NHS – our jewel in the crown. The coalition government has completely misled the electorate on this issue. You can add to the campaign by making your views known on 38degrees.org.uk - Save our NHS petition, and nhsalert.org.uk.

At Westminster I have scrutinised the Public Bodies Bill at committee. The Bill will allow Government Ministers to abolish, merge, or transfer the functions of a wide range of named public bodies. I am particularly concerned at the inclusion of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, the Human Tissue Authority and the Equality and Human Rights Commission in the Bill. These organisations have very specialised roles and it is vital that they maintain their independence and accountability. They should not be included in this Bill.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a largely hidden but substantial horror in the UK. The Government estimates that 80,000 women and girls in the UK are at risk of female genital mutilation. This includes 24,000 girls under the age of 15. The World Health Organisation states that these procedures on women's and girl's genitals have no health benefit, on the contrary they cause physical and mental health issues. They are rightly condemned as a violation of the human rights of girls and women.

I was greatly impressed, when I spoke at a National Conference on female genital mutilation in Birmingham, to see how partnerships are developing between healthcare professionals (including midwives, obstetricians, nurses, and public health professionals), community workers, policy makers, police and others. No prosecutions have been brought so far. However, new Crown Prosecution Service guidance is likely to change that and make it absolutely clear to people carrying out FGM that it is against the law.

I am supporting the Palfrey-based Elderly Persons Social Centre in the NatWest Community Force funding competition. The centre does excellent work reducing social isolation by providing a welcoming environment where over 50's can socialise and enjoy activities such as exercise classes and cultural events together. Sadly they have run out of funding. However, if the Centre gains enough votes, NatWest will donate £6,000 towards its upkeep and its excellent work with older people in the community. Please join me in voting online for the Centre's application by visiting <http://communityforce.natwest.com/project/3515> .

Valerie Vaz MP

10 October 2011