

19 October 2020

Sir Simon Stevens
Chief Executive
NHS England
Skipton House
80 London Road
London
SE1 6LH

Dear Sir Simon,

As Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, I am writing in connection with my statutory responsibility to encourage good practice in the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of modern slavery offences and the identification of victims.

Since taking up this post in May 2019 I have established a health working group to bring together key stakeholders from across the health and anti-slavery sector. I have been encouraged by the dedication and commitment across the sector to ensuring that health professionals are adequately trained and equipped to identify victims, respond to their needs and refer them for further support. However, at our most recent meeting at the start of October, I was disappointed to learn that the NHS England Modern Slavery Network is to be disbanded with modern slavery related activity to be mainstreamed into the three priority workstreams that have been identified: tackling serious violence, domestic abuse and preventing child sexual abuse/exploitation, as well as the broader adult and child safeguarding networks.

Whilst I acknowledge the rationale for this shift and the desire for responses to modern slavery to be considered as part of the broader response to safeguarding vulnerable people, it is still a relatively young and emerging agenda, victims of modern slavery may have specific health needs and there is still a considerable amount of work to be done ensure a consistent level of awareness among frontline professionals. Modern Slavery has an impact on physical, mental, emotional, relational and social well-being and is therefore a global public health issue. I along with others from the working group are concerned that by mainstreaming this work at such an early stage and therefore removing the governance and accountability currently in place that this could stall some of the good progress that has been made by the health sector in recent years. It is felt that more time to raise awareness of modern slavery as a separate agenda would be beneficial.

I therefore seek assurance from you that modern slavery will be incorporated within the relevant agendas for these newly formed groups and that the membership will include experts who can speak with knowledge and insight in relation to both adult and child victims of modern slavery.

I look forward to receiving your response. In the interests of transparency, I request that you respond in a way that enables me to publish your letter on my website.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dan Yuen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dan" and the last name "Yuen" clearly distinguishable.

Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner

