

Palliative care funding review: Can Whitehall's exciting ideas be made to work, asks St Luke's Hospice Plymouth

St Luke's welcomes the outcomes of the independent palliative care funding review commissioned by Andrew Lansley, Secretary of State for Health, published Friday.

The key recommendations allow the NHS to better finance its responsibilities to support and care for dying patients, a development the charity believes has the potential to improve the services available for the terminally ill. However, it now remains to be seen whether the recommendations will be implemented in full, and the necessary funding made available, say St Luke's bosses.

The proposed model would be a very different way of funding care. Currently most of the NHS funding for hospices is by way of a grant towards the care they deliver. On average across England, this covers about one third of the cost of providing care for our patients. The remaining millions needed must then be raised from the local population's generous fundraising.

The new proposal is to fund all organisations for the care they deliver, based on assessments of patient needs. There is also a push towards ensuring patients have a single key worker throughout their journey through the healthcare system. St Luke's believes this is the right approach, it is fair to all providers and it firmly focuses on patient's needs.

Also worth noting is that the extra services provided by St Luke's, which can make such a difference to those facing the end of their life, would not be funded under the proposals. The charity would therefore need to continue to raise money for things like therapies and family support.

If St Luke's were lucky enough to receive a larger contribution towards the basic medical and nursing costs, any extra money would be invested in more community services and increased support for patients and their families

St Luke's Clinical Director George Lillie said "It's great to see that the government is making end of life care a priority and has commissioned this report. But we do wonder if there will be any new money available to implement these proposals. In an ideal world there would be some extra funds so that we could channel more of our fundraising into our additional and support services. These make such a difference to our patients and we are worried that there could be a reduction in the NHS support we receive,

affecting these facilities if much needed funds go elsewhere. The ideas are good but we now need to see how they will actually translate into improving peoples lives.”

ENDS