



*Richmond House  
79 Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2NL  
Tel: 020 7210 5334  
Switchboard: 020 7210 3000*

To: SHA Chief Executives  
cc: SHA Directors of Performance  
Gateway: 6426

5 May 2006

Dear everyone

### **Out of Hours Care**

The National Audit Office (NAO) Report on the provision of out-of-hours care in England is being published today.

The report is a well-balanced account of the impact of changes to out-of-hours services since the new arrangements came into effect. One of the headline findings is the significant scope to reduce costs and this letter is to encourage you and PCTs to take this forward.

The NAO split PCTs into six categories based on rural classification and assessed their performance. From this they identified the most cost effective and best performing PCT in each category. The benchmark data is attached as Annex A.

The NAO recommend that PCTs:

- Drive value for money from future tendering processes based on real competition
- Continue to test the cost effective use of other health professionals alongside GPs in out of hours teams
- Develop activity and cost data so as to improve provider performance
- Analyse case mix to see if particular patient groups can be targeted by specialist primary or secondary care teams in order to reduce reliance on the out-of-hours services
- Commission integrated urgent and unscheduled care services in order to reduce duplication
- Providers making further operational improvements to deliver more effective utilisation and infrastructure of staff

To support you and PCTs in this we will revise our model contract guidance with the aim of getting this to you by July.

The NAO will also host a conference for SHAs and PCTs and out of hours providers in late summer/early autumn.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Duncan Selbie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

Duncan Selbie  
Director of Programmes and Performance

cc: Sir Ian Carruthers, Richard Douglas, Margaret Edwards, Richard Gleave, Kevin Orford