



CRC 12/09

27 April 2009

Rural Advocate visits Berwick-upon-Tweed to hear about impact of major life events for rural people

People in rural areas experiencing major life events are at risk from lack of access to services when they need them most. As part of a major study looking at different life events – cancer, stroke, job loss, becoming a young carer and having a baby – Dr. Stuart Burgess, the Government's Rural Advocate and Chair of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) is visiting Berwick-upon-Tweed on 27 and 28 April.

Dr Burgess aims to see first-hand how people are coping with these situations and will be spending time with a range of different projects including a cancer group, a carers' organisation, youth project and the local Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Health outcomes for those living in rural areas are generally better than for urban. But this does not mean that problems do not exist and gaining physical access to the right services can be a challenge. "We wouldn't expect in the treatment of cancer, for example, to see an oncology unit on every village green", says Dr. Burgess, "but we are calling on health providers to pay greater attention to delivering cancer services closer to people's homes, wherever possible".

"Strokes are the biggest cause of disability in England, and yet many of the issues it causes can only be dealt with by trained therapists being able to see clients, but after-stroke care is extremely scarce in rural areas. We really need some innovative ideas to support stroke survivors and that's one of the areas I want to discuss on my visit.

"Support for young carers in rural areas can fall between different health, education and social services. In rural areas, opportunities for young carers to get together are few and far between, and the challenges of access to transport and isolation are coupled with the under-recognised caring responsibilities that children as young as eight take on. I am looking forward to hearing more about these issues during my visit, as well as some solutions."

Access to maternity services in rural areas can also be patchy. Whilst some midwife-led units are exceptional, and deliver outstanding results, if hospitals close in the afternoon and don't open at weekends, pregnant women will not receive the service they need. Some rural areas struggle to maintain more informal support networks and groups of new mums that are such a ready support system in urban areas. Dr. Burgess' visit will look at the situation in and around Berwick-upon-Tweed.

One very current concern is with job loss in rural areas. Dr. Burgess adds: "I will also be visiting schemes that are working hard, in challenging times, to support people that have lost their jobs."

Dr. Burgess concludes: "I will be reporting what I see and hear back to government, and recommending action to policy makers to help sustain the rural economy, rural communities and those people in very real need of access to the highest quality health services"

ENDS

For further information contact Chris Wynne-Davies on 01242 534070

Notes to editors:

1 For further information about CRC's Major Life Events work, see: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/projects/majorlifeevents/overview

2 The CRC was established in April 2005 and became an independent body on 1 October 2006 following the enactment of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The role of the CRC is to provide well-informed, independent advice to government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs and circumstances of people living and working in rural England. We give particular focus to tackling disadvantage and economic underperformance.

We have three key functions:

- Advocate: the voice for rural people, business and communities;
- Expert adviser: providing evidence-based, objective advice to government and others; and
- Independent watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.

Further information about the CRC and its work can be found at: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk