

29th March 2006

Response to the Wanless Review from PRIAE

- Currently 15 per cent of UK over 50's are from BME communities, expected to double
- 83 per cent of elders from non-English-speaking backgrounds do not feel confident communicating in English
- 40 per cent of ethnic minority elders in the UK, in spite of working, rely on benefits in old age.
- Ethnic minority males' weekly income is 33 per cent lower than their white counterparts
- Palliative care is colour blind

Responding to the Wanless Review, Director of PRIAE the Policy Research Institute on Ageing and Ethnicity Professor Naina Patel OBE says:

"We welcome the Wanless Review's warnings about the demographic changes that are taking place within British Society: a point that is particularly pertinent in light of Gordon Brown's 2006 budget statement which failed to address the pension and healthcare crises that affect the ageing population.

Currently 15 per cent of the UK's over-50s are from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds. Current research show that 83 per cent of those constituents do not feel at home

PRIAE also echoes the recommendations for a free personal care allowance. There are currently 2.5 million elders living below the poverty line in the UK and there are serious deficiencies in the social welfare structure; issues which are compounded within ethnic minority communities. But implementing the recommendations must be informed by specific facts which affect BME communities. 40 per cent of BME elders in the UK are on some form of social benefit. The average weekly income of an ethnic minority male is 32.5 per cent less than his white counterpart between the ages of 60 to 64, a difference that increases to 44.7 per cent over 65. These inequalities in old age are heightened by lack of information, language barriers, cultural and religious misunderstandings between patient and carer, and a distrust of authorities deriving from previous colour blind practices or worse, racist experiences. Fairness and opportunities are vital components in achieving this mandate for social justice.

The National Council for Palliative Care's research shows that 96.4 per cent of patients cared for by palliative care services were 'white', whereas only 1.34 per cent were 'black', 0.98 per cent were Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi and 1.32 per cent were Chinese/other/mixed. The development of a more bespoke and personalised care system would start to address this imbalance and fulfil the converging needs of an adequate social welfare system and culturally-appropriate health care.

Sir Derek speaks of 'a neglected area of public life 'where 'older people deserve better support than they are currently receiving'. The most neglected area – that of social care for BME elders – needs to be addressed immediately before the crisis deepens.

In old age we should all be able to live as comfortably as possible. If Liam Byrne, the care services minister, is really committed to ensuring that 'treatment is delivered with respect for their dignity', then he must take the words of the Wanless Review to heart."