

## **Alan White – speech to MHF & RSPH Challenges and Changes event 15/11/12**

### **Check against delivery.**

Thank you Peter.

And thank you to the RSPH for recognising Peter's contribution and for working with us this evening and across the years. It has taken a serious family illness to prevent the RSPH's Richard Parish joining us this evening as planned.

I would also like to thank our sponsors for this evening Pfizer and Sanofi-Pasteur MSD. We know how committed they are to improving men's health and we look forward to continuing to work with both organisations.

Peter, you have again demonstrated why you should be included in any list of leading public health experts and how we can only improve the public health by significantly improving the health of men.

I count myself lucky to have worked with you. Working tirelessly for many years with Ian as MHF's president you built this organisation and ensured we punch above our weight.

In fact I consider myself a lucky chairman!

Thanks to the commitment of the current and past members of staff and the board of trustees, the Men's Health Forum has gone from strength to strength and this year we agreed a new strategic plan to take the organisation in to the next phase of its fight to improve the health of men and boys.

And we must continue this fight.

There has been some good news about men's health in the headlines recently.

Life expectancy at birth and at 65 continues to improve.

New figures shows that coronary artery disease still accounts for 1 in 6 male deaths but deaths from heart disease continue to fall - in fact over the last decade they have nearly halved for both men and women, an incredible rate of improvement.

However, the same disease highlights the challenge we still face and why the Men's Health Forum must continue its fight. The gap between rich and poor on heart disease has increased and we know that that the social gradient in health particularly affects men.

Men are hit by a double whammy of health and deprivation.

The Men's Health Forum is the centre of excellence on men's health and our campaign so far has made us the voice for the health and well-being of men and boys.

So our fight to tackle men's needlessly poor health builds on all of our experience, our research and our policy.

Our fight builds on our policy pedigree:

To Campaign for changes that will make a difference to men and boys, especially in those communities where the problems are greatest.

To Develop local community networks of professionals and volunteers.

And to Provide information, resources and training to equip organisations and professionals to deliver services to men and boys.

We are all excited by our new project in the boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark in south London. We believe this is that largest and most concentrated attempt ever made to improve male health in one particular area.

This project will see us work with the local communities across the Lambeth and Southwark to improve the health of men in some of the country's most deprived areas and develop new health services for men that can be launched nationally.

This project is possible due to the generous funding of the Guy's and St Thomas' charity who saw our innovative work as providing the foundation for this important work.

The Men's Health Forum's Lambeth and Southwark health improvement work will further our expertise developing health services and will launch the organisation in to a new phase of delivering services directly to men.

To put it bluntly, the MHF will be practising what we preach. We've long advised others on what's wrong with men's health, how to reach men and how to make health services more attractive to them. Now we're putting our money where our mouth is.

We will be providing more health promotion and education directly to men. We have been a long serving partner working with other charities to help Pfizer run the ManMOT website. Now, thanks to their generous support, we are about to relaunch the ManMOT website ourselves providing information and consultations direct to men. This fantastic online service will enable men to talk directly to a GP at a time convenient to them and in a convenient, confidential manner. No appointment needed.

Over time we'll be adding other health professionals that men want to talk to such as fitness trainers and relationship counsellors. We know from our award-winning malehealth website that this is the way men want to access health services. Through man MOT we'll be enabling them to do it.

The ManMOT website will be joined by a new generation of printed info for men, also under the ManMOT brand, and in due course by a smart-phone and tablet app which enable men to access the service from pretty much anywhere.

After 11 successful Men's Health Weeks we are already looking to next year. Next June will see us build on our commitment to improve men's mental well-being.

Three out of four suicides are men.

Many are young men.

It's still the biggest killer among men under 35. But we have also seen a big increase in the number of middle-aged men tragically taking their own lives. The state of the economy and work insecurity are thought to be major factors.

But these are two social challenges - economic strife and work insecurity - that show no sign of going away anytime soon. If we can't remove the causes, the short-term answer therefore has to be around making men comfortable looking for solutions. That's means talking about how we feel. Never easy, especially at work.

We want to tackle this stigma of mental health at work. We want men to be able to talk about their mental well-being as well as concerns about their physical health. With our expansion of ManMOT we will provide the tools to help - online and offline. When it comes to mental health it's particularly important to go where the men are - not wait for them to come to us.

Our four-person management team, Colin Penning, David Wilkins, Jim Pollard and Sultan Torshkhoev, are proving to be a fantastic interim chief executive! They have put in place our new programmes ready for the future.

They are now working with the board on arrangements to recruit a new permanent CEO in the new-year. I look forward to welcoming our new chief executive to the Men's Health Forum, to working with him or her to build on our successes and to deliver on our fight to tackle the health of men and boys.

I said at the start I consider myself a lucky chairman. I am also excited, and it's not just the wine this evening!

I am excited because the Men's Health Forum is stepping up its fight.

We cannot tolerate the health of men being left behind. The MHF is taking its pedigree in developing policy and practice and turning that into action.

But that is the challenge we've set ourselves. The MHF is drawing on its expertise to say: We know about men's health and we can show you how to 'do' it.

We also do it ourselves.