Hon. Rudyard Spencer, Minister of Health met with Chairmen of all Boards of entities that fall under the Ministry of Health this morning (Jan. 13, 2010) to discuss the Ministry's priorities and the restructuring exercise that is taking place in the public health sector. He told the group that an Interdisciplinary Transition Team has been established in the Ministry to manage the restructuring exercise and that the work had already started.

The restructuring exercise which is being led by the Office of the Prime Minister is intended to reduce waste, inefficiency and the cost of government bureaucracy. "There is need to reduce the fiscal deficit and the cost of government which at $157B is the second highest cost after debt servicing" he said.

The Minister told the Chairmen that the Ministry of Health was seeking to reduce the cost of the health bureaucracy by merging some entities, outsourcing and recentralizing some functions, transferring some functions to other ministries, and changing the approach to the procurement of major cost items such as drugs and medical sundries."

The Minister said that the economic challenges require a different approach to how resources, including human resources, were being managed.

Meanwhile, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health Dr. Jean Dixon said that the health ministry had direct responsibility for the achievement of three of the eight Millennium Development Goals and seven of the twenty-one targets. Noting that health was at the centre of the development agenda of the country, the Permanent Secretary said that there was need for an integrated approach to health policy development. "The performance of the health sector influences Jamaica's ranking on the Human Development Index (HDI) and Human Poverty Index (HPI)," she disclosed.

Dr. Dixon said that focus will be placed on implementing certain cost containment initiatives such as curtailing local and overseas travel, reducing the government's leave liability and using information and communications technologies (ICTs) to improve efficiency in administration and service delivery.

The Permanent Secretary said that the Ministry must work to sustain the health gains that have been made in areas such as immunization, HIV/AIDS, health promotion and protection and in controlling the outbreak of vector borne and parasitic diseases.

The Minister will meet with the Board Chairmen on a quarterly basis.