

# HEALTH EMERGENCY

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White Paper would combine biggest-ever cuts with biggest-ever privatisation

# Say NO to ConDem rationing boards!

The ConDem government's White Paper 'Liberating the NHS' makes many controversial proposals, but at its heart are two key factors: the fragmentation and privatisation of the NHS – and £20 billion of spending cuts by 2014.

The scale of these "efficiency savings" guarantees that even while it appears to give GPs greater control over services, the opposite is the case.

With tight budgets and cuts to be made, consortia of GPs established to spend £80 billion in commissioning budgets will inevitably become little more than rationing boards.

Far from improving services they will have to choose which services will be cut and which sections of patients should be excluded from treatment.

To accept this would not be "liberation" for the GPs or their patients: it would be a capitulation to the ConDem government.

As the debate over the White Paper begins to widen, it's clear that there is a strong and growing opposition to many of its core proposals, even among the group who appear to have most to gain from it.

GP magazine found fewer than one in five of the 300 GPs who responded to an online poll believed that the changes would improve patient experience or the funding of primary care services.

Twice as many (41 percent) feared a fresh "postcode lottery," while 71 percent expected the scrapping of PCTs and SHAs to lead to an increase in private sector involvement in commissioning. 60 percent of responses in a poll on the pro-White Paper National Association of Primary Care website also opposed the government's commissioning plans.

No wonder one of the leading apologists for the scheme, Dr Michael Dixon of the NHS Alliance, has issued a rather



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desperate appeal for GPs not to turn their backs on the government proposals, claiming that it would be "utterly disastrous" if they did not "embrace the White Paper and make it work".

But of course Dr Dixon has got it the wrong way round. The real disaster would be for GPs and their organisations to allow themselves to be cynically used by the government

to push through proposals which will have far-reaching and negative consequences for patients as well as for the NHS and its one million employees.

It will also be a disaster for tens of thousands of hospital doctors: the proposals could effectively privatise health provision and reduce England's NHS workforce from almost 1 million to virtually zero by 2014.

Despite these problems, at present the BMA is committed to "engage critically" with consultations on the ConDem plan.

This is a mistake. Indeed if the NHS Alliance, the Royal College of GPs and the BMA, along with the health unions which have already declared themselves against the proposals, simply took a firm stand against the White Paper, and marketisation and privatisation of health care that are implicit in it, the ConDems would not be able to carry out their plans.

Until a few weeks ago the BMA was conducting just such a campaign, now sadly side-

lined as they struggle for influence with Mr Lansley.

Perhaps the biggest reason for standing up against these plans, which could effectively transform the NHS into a National Health Market, with no public sector providers, is that there is absolutely no evidence that these expensive, experimental reforms – the biggest-ever privatisation of health care anywhere in the world – could deliver the promised improvements for patients.

It's all looking like a mess waiting to happen.

The cost of implementing the White Paper (upwards of £1.7bn) seems like a classic waste of money much better spent on patient care.

But from the point of view of Andrew Lansley and his Tory colleagues, if it resulted in denationalising the NHS, reversing the great legacy of Nye Bevan, and opening up a new £100 billion market to private companies, it would be seen as money well spent.

## SPECIAL APPEAL

### Help us campaign to save our NHS!

The NHS faces its biggest-ever threat: a 'double whammy' of massive cuts year by year to 2014, coupled with the White Paper proposals that could wipe out all public sector provision of services.

The ConDem government has no mandate to transform the National Health Service into a national health market. But if there is no public challenge, the White Paper could be forced quickly through Parliament.

Hospital staff have everything to lose and nothing to gain from the proposals which could see tens of thousands of jobs axed, and hundreds of thousands pushed out of the NHS workforce, with new threats to their pay scales and pensions.

Every cutback that is accepted will just encourage desperate employers to come back for more.

It really is do or die for those of us who want to defend the NHS as a public service, and who value the staff who deliver services.

To build a successful campaign requires resources, publicity, time and effort: and until there is a broad popular campaign established with the support of the main health unions, much of the work will fall to organisations like London Health Emergency.

But right now, we don't have the resources to cope.

We need help to keep the issue in the media, and work with local campaigners to get the message across in meetings, protests and local publicity. Just producing and distributing this newspaper has cost £2000.

We urge any readers or supporting organisations that can do so to make a donation, as large as you can afford, to ensure we have the resources to keep on fighting to scupper Lansley's White Paper, keep our NHS intact ... and keep it public.

■ You can donate by cheque (to 'LHE'), or online at [www.healthemergency.org.uk](http://www.healthemergency.org.uk)







# 2-year pay freeze – and threat of pension “review”

The ConDems are imposing a pay freeze on all NHS staff paid more than £21k/year, with a below inflation increase of just £250 for those paid less than this.

This would mean only 38% of NHS staff in England who are on pay points 1-15 getting a rise next year.

The so called independence of the PRB will be tested once again if a pay freeze is imposed from above by the government after evidence is submitted as usual by unions in September.

The biggest health union UNISON is going ahead with the data cleansing needed to ensure that its members are able to take industrial action without legal interference as agreed in the motion on pay passed at its Health Conference this year.

UNISON members will be consulted on how to respond to the pay freeze: but this is by no means the only threat that NHS staff face. This autumn the ConDem Review of Public Sector Pensions makes its report.

The review, which has disgracefully been chaired by former Labour Minister “Lord” John Hutton, is expected to slash NHS pension benefits, as well as those of other public sector workers.

UNISON national conference in July voted for national industrial action across the public sector if pensions are attacked.



# White Paper threat to mental health

Mental health professionals and campaigners have rounded on the ConDem government for its combination of damaging cutbacks, and the threat that mental health services will lose out even further under the new plans to hand over the commissioning role to GPs.

In July a heavyweight medical journal, the Lancet, published an editorial demanding Health Secretary Andrew Lansley “tell the truth about NHS cuts” in front-line services, singling out the brutal cuts being carried through against mental health services in Oxfordshire, and contrasting this with Lansley’s pre-election pledge to “increase health spending every year”.

Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Mental Health Foundation Trust is pushing through plans to slash £5.3m from its £42m budget (12.6%) over the next four years, hitting front-line services for both adults and older adults.

Adult services are to lose 3 out of 19 consultant psychiatrists, 16 coordinators and 9 other staff, along with cuts in

clinical psychologists.

Older adult services will also face cuts in professional staff.

Meanwhile a trade union representing some of the community mental health staff, Unite, has warned that up to 50 of the Trust’s 200 staff in adult mental health teams could lose their jobs in the cuts, after inpatient services have already been cut “to the bone”.

## Poorer service

The document leaked to the Lancet admits that the cuts will bring a “reduction in quality of service”, poorer service response with “patients waiting for care” and “dissatisfaction” among patients and carers.

The impact on staff is also admitted to be serious, with the Trust predicting “potential negative impact on staff from them perceiving an increase in their workload”, “poorer staff retention and reduction in staff satisfaction with their role”.

Perhaps even more worrying the document also warns the decreased patient satisfaction could lead to “possible patient withdrawal from care”.

At a time when demand for

mental health care is increasing and the severity of the problems faced by patients is increasing, with a greater expectation that services will be available “closer to home”, home visits in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire would be cut.

Other cuts are taking shape in mental health services in London and other parts of the country including Sussex, where a quarter of inpatient beds are to close, affecting services in Haywards Heath, Eastbourne and St Leonards to save £4m.

In central London, NHS Camden is planning to put psychological services out to tender, triggering fears that a private company could step in. Indeed other government policies are also causing problems for mental health patients, not least the latest onslaught on the benefits system which will target people on incapacity benefit.

The new “fit to work” policy could mean that people suffering from mental illness would be declared capable of work. Mental health charity Mind has warned that the new test



Philip Wolmuth reportdigital.co.uk

Workers at the Hackney Centre for Forensic Mental Health join a Unison protest outside East London NHS Foundation Trust against privatisation and cuts

for incapacity benefit does not take proper account of the fluctuation condition of many with mental illness, and that staff running the assessments are insufficiently trained in awareness of mental health issues.

## GPs say no

Long-term concerns for the future of mental health services under the White Paper proposals have been reinforced by the survey of GPs in July which showed that as few as one in three felt equipped to take on any responsibility for commissioning on mental health.

Mental health charity Rethink, which conducted the survey, warned that unless there was rapid action to educate GPs on mental health,

many of the 1.5 million people with severe mental illnesses may fail to get the treatment they need.

Rethink’s Chief Executive Paul Jenkins said: “We often hear from people with mental illness that GPs don’t understand mental health and want to quickly refer them on to specialists. Now GPs themselves are telling us that they have concerns too.”

“The proposals expected in the white paper can work, but only if GPs are given proper training and support to understand the needs of people with severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.”

Another survey of GPs by the doctors.net website in July

found that two thirds of those responding did not welcome the Lansley white paper, and 80% said they were not adequately equipped to take over commissioning mental health services.

Mind’s chief executive Paul Farmer also warned of weaknesses in GPs’ approach to mental health issues: “There is still an instinct for some GPs to reach for the pills too quickly – we have 36 million prescriptions a year for anti-depressants, a vast amount at primary care level.”

Mental health problems on average take up between 10%-20% of the time of a GP, with around three out of every four people who experience mental health problems seeking treatment from their GP.

Every year 300 out of every 1,000 people experience some form of mental health problem: but it seems that the NHS has a long way to go before this scale of importance is recognised in the allocation of resources.

Instead of moving towards meeting this level of demand, the White Paper proposals will create an even more random “postcode lottery” for mental health patients ... and place millions in commissioning budgets in the hands of GPs who recognise that they are not trained to it properly, and don’t want to do it.

## Affiliate now to Health Emergency!

London Health Emergency, launched in 1983, works with local campaigns and health union branches and regions all over England, Wales and Scotland.

The campaigning resources of Health Emergency depend upon affiliations and donations from organisations and individuals.

■ If you have not already done so, please affiliate your organisation for 2010: the annual fee is still the same as 1983 – £25 for larger organisations (over 500 members).

■ If you have affiliated, please consider a donation.

■ Affiliates receive bundles (35 copies) of each issue of Health Emergency and other mailings.

■ Additional copies of Health Emergency are available: bundles of 75 for £20, and 150 for £40.

■ Send to LHE at BCM London Health Emergency, London WC1N 3XX

■ You can call JOHN LISTER on 07774-264112.

■ or email [healthemergency@gmail.com](mailto:healthemergency@gmail.com)

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