

HEALTH EMERGENCY

The Health Watchdog

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PRESS RELEASE

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NHS cuts put more hospitals at risk of Mid-Staffs failures

THE SHOCKING failures of management and care at Stafford Hospital could be echoed in other hospitals up and down the country if ministers insist on pushing through the massive cutbacks in spending and impossible “efficiency savings” that are now being discussed, warns pressure group Health Emergency.

A key factor in the chronic lack of nursing and other staff, and desperately poor staff training at Mid Staffordshire Trust was the 150 jobs that were axed in a £10m cost-cutting operation to ensure that the Trust brought its finances into balance – to secure Foundation Trust status.

Nurse and medical staffing were slashed to well below safe minimum levels – and the Trust was rubber-stamped as a Foundation shortly before its appalling levels of care were belatedly identified by the Healthcare Commission.

But dozens, if not hundreds of NHS and Foundation Hospitals are facing cuts much larger than £10m, and much larger cuts in staffing as the squeeze on NHS spending takes effect from 2010-11. Some Trusts such as Leicestershire, Leeds, Derby, Heatherwood and Wexham, and the Royal Free are already axing hundreds of jobs.

Many more have yet to announce how they aim to deliver the required “efficiency savings” and balance their books while Primary Care Trusts concentrate on diverting as many patients as they can away from hospitals, and slash the “tariff” of payments for treating patients.

Health Emergency’s Information Director John Lister said:

“Health Secretary Andy Burnham has correctly argued that lessons have to be learned from the Mid Staffordshire scandal: but it makes no sense to keep on having inquiries about it if more and more Trust managers are simply going to be forced into the same desperate situation as the Stafford Hospital management.

“There is a real danger that the mounting NHS pressure to deliver huge, quite unprecedented demands for “efficiency savings” and spending cuts – on a level never ever achieved in the NHS in its 62-year history – will drive more managers to seek similar irresponsible savings at the expense of patient care.

“If ministers – and the opposition politicians cynically trying to cash in on this tragic situation – really want to reassure the public that no such thing will happen again, we need them to take the pressure off managers, and back-track on the savings targets and cash allocations for the NHS.

“We need all the main parties to commit NOW to increase NHS spending by a minimum of 4% per year in real terms. If tens of billions can be created and spent on “quantitative easing” to benefit the bankers, no voter will object to some of the same generosity being shown to prevent unacceptable and dangerous cuts to our NHS.”

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