

NHS cuts from a nurse's viewpoint

An NHS mental health nurse

Cameron's government claims to be 'defending the NHS.' He claims the health care budget is 'ring fenced.' Anyone working on the NHS front-line knows that this is a lie. Services, already stretched to breaking point, are being further cut by managers with little understanding of their value.

Even when Tory minister Andrew Lansley's Health and Social Care Bill was on a pause for a 'listening exercise', local cuts to NHS services were still steaming ahead. In the mental health trust I work for, the unions had notice of the first wave of redundancies that will hit nurses and others doing essential work.

Lansley's bill lines up GPs to take over NHS budgets, who will link themselves together via huge 'GP Commissioning Consortia'. These consortia will be required to be 'successful' and keep costs down. Many health services will be discontinued if they are not deemed 'cost-effective'. Working class areas, with the highest health needs, will lose out in these new arrangements.

Priority will be given to working in partnership with private providers who pay their workers a pittance and are prepared to sacrifice quality of service to make profits and keep costs down to win contracts.

In the NHS trust I work for, we are told that the 'addictions market is saturated'. A quarter of the NHS addictions in-patient bed capacity has now been slashed. Nurses have to re-interview for jobs that they have



NHS workers protest at attacks on their services photo Paul Mattsson

done for years. Those who are unsuccessful are dispersed or risk being made redundant.

Meanwhile the private companies are failing to provide onsite medical services, psychological services and methadone maintenance programmes. These cheaper providers, however, are now the 'preferred providers'. In health and social care service provision, competition is invariably based on price, never on quality.

In adult mental health services, community practice nurses and social workers are under pressure to measure our interventions or 'outcomes' in a box-ticking exercise.

Price tariffs are put on 'units of care' - six to twelve sessions of 'cognitive behavioural therapy' would be deemed a 'unit of care'.

We are being pushed to either discharge patients from mental health teams before they are ready or to move them onto other teams so that 'activity' can be seen. This activity is a measure of 'success' and means that the hospital trust will earn more money (this is PBR - 'payment by results').

Meanwhile the vulnerable service user is pushed from pillar to post and will be stripped of the chance to develop the sort of long-term re-

lationship with one mental health worker that can really help.

Clearly a fightback is needed in the NHS. Trade union activity can challenge the interests of the big business vultures and their government allies. Health workers must take a stand. We know that high-quality health care services, free at the point of delivery, cannot be provided on the cheap.

Along with their patients and carers, nurses suffer most from these cuts. As the largest section of the NHS workforce, we must speak out and defend our patients' welfare. We don't lead affluent lifestyles, we

are from the same social class as our patients. We need to remember this before we let others higher up the health hierarchy speak for us and our patients!

Nurses and other health staff concerned at the impact of cuts must get actively involved in our trade union branches. The best way to mobilise a union branch is for members to organise, have regular workplace meetings on local issues and put collective pressure on branch leaders.

We cannot let do-nothing careerists dominate our union branches as too many have done for years. It is better to take industrial action than have an entire hospital ward or other service lost permanently.

There has never been a better time to raise the issue of a ballot for strike action in health union branch meetings. Sustained collective pressure from members is the key to getting industrial action on the agenda. We need unity and coordinated action with other public sector workers - cuts to housing, benefits and social services all undermine our patients' health and well-being.

Union members are angry and disillusioned. Ideas to unite and fight back will be welcomed by those who don't wish to fall victim to NHS trust managers' divide and rule tactics.

There will be attacks, both from health managers and even some union branch leaders but genuine activists, who keep our members' interests at the heart of everything we do, will gain these members' support.

Vicious Tory bullies hit...

Simon Carter

Government ministers, aided and abetted by the right wing media, have labelled the majority of disability benefit claimants as scroungers after the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) said 39% were fully fit for work.

However, these figures were rubbished by a parliamentary committee report which concluded: "It is widely accepted that the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), as introduced in 2008 [by Labour - Eds], was flawed. This has been borne out by the high number of appeals and

the high success rate of appellants. It was also reflected in the amount of evidence from individuals who expressed grievances with the way they were treated during the process and the accuracy of the outcome."

Atos Healthcare, a for-profit company, receives £100 million a year from the government to carry out the medical tests to determine whether claimants are fit for work. One claimant, Larry Newman, who attended an Atos interview with a terminal lung disease, was deemed 'fit for work' and his benefit was cut. Larry died a few weeks later.

In the past three years 160,000 people have successfully appealed

against decisions to cut their benefits. MPs estimate the cost to the taxpayer of these appeals at around £50 million a year. Employment minister, Chris Grayling, accepts the WCA tests are flawed but the government continues to use Atos.

The PCS civil servants union general secretary, Mark Serwotka, said: "This exercise is just about saving money by bullying people who are sick or disabled onto lower levels of benefit.

"It is not about finding people work - because there is no work available. The government is failing to create jobs, while cutting thousands of posts in the public sector."

...disabled benefits

Rob Windsor

Banner press headlines recently told us that only 7% of those claiming incapacity benefits are unfit to work.

This is wholly untrue. It is the product of past and present governments creating an agenda to push sick people off benefits.

The real reason is financial. In most cases a person will not go from benefits into work.

They will simply end up claiming Jobseeker's Allowance at the same £67.50 a week as the Assessment stage Employment Support Allow-

ance (ESA) figure.

Only those lucky enough to get past Atos, often via a tribunal, will qualify for the additional £30 or so either in higher ESA or Income Support premiums. That's hardly the life of Riley.

Very few people want to live on sick benefits. A stoical army of people with long-term painful and debilitating conditions still work, often encountering prejudice by employers.

Unfortunately we hear too little of such people and of those who simply cannot work any more and deserve financial stability.

"People are suspicious that the government's only objective is to save money."

Parliament's Work and Pensions Committee recently produced a report showing that vulnerable benefit claimants, including incapacity benefit claimants, had payments stopped because of errors in work assessments. Overbooking of interview slots

led to some people being marked as 'failing to attend', leading to payments being suspended.


Even Dame Anne Begg, who chairs the committee, commented: "People are suspicious that the government's only objective is to save money."

Save Lancaster House



Salford council wants to close Lancaster House, which provides supported accommodation and rehab for hundreds of young men who otherwise would be homeless. Residents, staff and supporters marched to lobby the council to keep it open.

8,000 supporters backed the campaign against the closure online. David Allum, chair of the residents' Peer Group told us: "The council have breached the Disability Discrimination Act and we're going to fight the closure all the way." Full report on www.socialistparty.org.uk photo Hugh Caffrey



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