

# Breast implant scandal exposes private healthcare

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Sue Powell

How could PIP get away with selling implants made from industrial grade silicone used in mattresses and computers? The company already had a bad name - its products were banned by US authorities (the FDA) in 2000. UK patients sued successfully after the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) identified inadequacies in the biological safety of its production of hydrogel implants (although the insurance companies have not paid up).

Warnings about PIP silicone implants began circulating in France and Britain three years ago. PIP implants were the cheapest available: they had no protective coating and the silicone used was ten times cheaper than medical grade silicone.

This is not the first scandal involving private practice and the next "toxic time bomb" - artificial face implants - is already ticking. With over 60,000 people receiving cosmetic surgery in Britain every year, cosmetic surgery is big business.

But cosmetic surgery is not just about vanity: its development as a major branch of medicine began with pioneering treatment of horrific and debilitating injuries sustained by soldiers and airmen during the two world wars.

Reconstructive surgery is vital to cancer patients, burns and trauma victims, but this work is mainly con-



The whole NHS is at risk from private profiteers photo Dave Carr

finied to the NHS.

The proliferation of private practice reflects a media-driven obsession with body image. Massive industry expansion did not lead to more stringent licensing and control - quite the opposite. Clinics do not even have adequate insurance. As increasing numbers of teenag-

ers opt for cosmetic surgery, some clinics are offering underage clients payment plans. It is unlikely they will be as eager to help when the estimated 20% of their clients need corrective surgery.

The whole story reveals some ugly aspects of private medicine and the medical devices industry. With

worldwide sales exceeding \$300 billion in 2011, competition in the medical devices industry is fierce. There are 18,000 companies in Europe alone, hence the massive pressure to 'cut costs'.

Last year, artificial hip joints sold by Johnson & Johnson were withdrawn because metal, rather than

plastic and metal had been used in their manufacture. Patients experienced severe pain and toxic metal deposits in the blood - many thousands will have to undergo corrective surgery. In 1983 one US study found that 20% of pacemakers implanted were medically unnecessary. One patient endured six ops and paid \$60,000 only to be told her heart was healthy. This is what marketisation of health care means.

Medical devices such as breast implants, artificial hip joints, facial fillers and pacemakers are not subject to the same stringent controls as apply to drugs.

Manufacturers do not have to prove safety on the basis of clinical trials. GPs and surgeons are required to report problems, but the lack of a national register of implants makes it difficult to track problems. Ruptures are often due to accidents which might not be linked to product quality and leaking implants do not always cause immediate symptoms. UK clinics were not obliged to divulge information on sourcing and many still refuse to do so.

None of this explains why no action was taken. Back in 2010 the Hospital Group and Healthcare UK were offering free consultations to concerned patients with PIP implants. Even after PIP products were banned, they were sold in Holland under a different name. Private practice makes a mockery of the physician's oath "to do no harm" and replaces it with "greed is good".

## End the slave labour culture of workfare

Paul Callanan

Youth Fight for Jobs

The clocks are being turned back. The future for young people is looking like it has been ripped from the pages of Dickens' novels - with the Con-Dem government and local governments playing the role of modern day workhouse masters.

Over the past months 10,000 people have been taking part in a trial run of a work-for-your-dole scheme. The government have touted it as a chance for the unemployed to get themselves back into work and gain experience in the workplace. But Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) has warned all along that this was merely a wheeze for the bosses to get work done for free.

The results have borne this out. Of the 10,000 people that were forced onto the trial, around 20% turned down the "work". Another 30% simply didn't show up on the first day. The government are clearly living in la la land when they hail this trial as a success.

Employment minister Chris Grayling has made the insulting claim that this failure is down to some people being deterred "because they are working in the black economy or they don't want to look for a job".

One young job seeker is suing the government. Cait Reilly, a graduate who has been unable to find work, had planned to volunteer at a museum. This job fits in perfectly with her desired career as a geologist. Yet that had to be cancelled as she was forced to work in a Poundland. She



Youth Fight for Jobs on the Jarrow march photo Sarah Wrack

is taking the government to court on the grounds that forcing people to work for free contravenes her basic human rights.

Another pilot scheme has been rolled out by Labour controlled Islington council. They plan to force school students to become "junior assistants". For £25 they will spend hours after school and Saturdays doing jobs like "highway repairs or photocopying and filing, or making tea and coffee for meetings."

We have to demand that if the job is out there, workers doing it should be well paid and on good terms and conditions. What we are seeing instead is the true face of Victorian values. If you can't find work then be prepared to become a slave.

Workfare can demoralise a whole

generation of people. But it will also accelerate the race to bottom. Existing workers could be driven to accept lower pay and working conditions for fear of their employer taking on JSA claimants to do the job.

The only real solutions to the scourge of unemployment are socialist ones. To roll back the tide of the slave labour culture we need to build a mass movement that can change society. We need a movement that calls for the nationalisation, under democratic workers' control, of the top 150 corporations that control the vast majority of wealth. We need programmes of public works like house building. And we need a benefits system that genuinely helps get people back onto their feet and protects us from poverty.

## John Lewis economy: another fantasy from Corporal Clegg

Elaine Brunskill

Lib Dem leader and deputy prime minister Nick Clegg has outlined his vision of a 'John Lewis economy' saying that businesses owned by their staff are more dynamic and have higher morale.

For former factory workers in a Carlisle textile and dyeing company, this must sound like a sick joke.

The factory had been part of the John Lewis Partnership since 1965, and many of the workers had been there for decades. However, the 'partnership' decided the factory was no longer viable and had to be sold on. One of the workers explained to us that John Lewis called a consultation meeting, but "We were textile workers up against professionals. I asked the personnel

head: If we are all co-owners, what part of the business do we own? He replied: 'Tough decisions have to be made.'"

The factory was sold on to Stead McAlpin, and in April 2009 60 of the workers were sacked, but did not receive the enhanced redundancy payments they would have been entitled to if they'd still worked for John Lewis.

At the time of being sacked the workers told us that John Lewis always referred to the partnership as a democracy: "but it was only a democracy until their profits were threatened - then there was an inner steel ring to defend: big pensions; big salaries and big pay-offs for the bosses."

If this is the best vision of capitalism on offer for workers it's time to look for an alternative!



Workers took their protest to Oxford Street photo Elaine Brunskill