

Breast implant scandal exposes private healthcare

KEEP PRIVATE VULTURES OUT OF OUR NHS!



Sue Powell

One blog on the PIP breast implant scandal read: "How many people realise, when you entrust your health to a private clinic you have less consumer protection than if you bought a used car?"

Some people think women should pay for their 'bad lifestyle choice' but the NHS should not discriminate – this is how private medical insurance works – denying help to alcoholics, smokers, drug addicts, the obese, people who engage in 'dangerous' activities (which potentially could include occupational risks) or have health problems.

The scandal over PIP breast implants has wide implications and affects a staggering 300,000-400,000 women in 65 countries. The Con-Dem government has shown callous disregard towards the 40,000 British women who have PIP breast implants (Poly Implant Prothese).

Last week, some of them, carrying placards reading "Health Before Wealth" and "Toxic Time Bombs", protested outside the Harley Medical Group (HMG). HMG, like other clinics, refuses to pay for the routine removal of PIP implants.

Women were told to approach their clinics but many calls were unanswered. Some clinics declared bankruptcy (opening later under another name). HMG's chair, Mel Braham, who advised

the Labour government on industry regulation and standards, even thinks the whole thing is a conspiracy engineered by competitors.

The four biggest clinics, including HMG and Transform (turnover last year of £36.2m) are implicated in the majority of the 40,000 operations using PIP implants. Scandalously, HMG claims its clinics do not have the resources or time to cope with the 'panic' of its patients. It wants the NHS to do the ops, while HMG would pay for new implants – but demands a government loan to do so.

UK health secretary Lansley, after issuing several conflicting statements, agrees with the clinics that routine removal of implants is not medically indicated, but now says the NHS would pay to remove, but not replace, implants (although the Welsh Government has promised to do so in Wales). Replacing implants is not a cosmetic exercise: there are health implications and this policy will cause further distress and expense to the NHS.

But it is not all bad news for business: Now PIP is bankrupt, no-win, no-fee lawyers are eagerly touting for clients online. MyBreast, MyFace, MyBody has identified an opportunity, stating it has never used the French implants, will offer free consultation and can help women with PIP implants.

The case for fighting Lansley's NHS reforms and the need for public ownership and control of all areas of medical practice, including the pharmaceutical and medical device industries, has surely never been stronger.

Continued on page 10

The Health and Social Care Bill, currently working its way through Parliament, is a huge threat to our NHS. The government is trying to sneak through privatisation under the guise of 'reform'. All the big business parties agree that 'the market' can help run our public services efficiently. But we've seen countless examples of the devastating effect of handing these services over to private companies who only care about making profit. The latest is the scandal over PIP breast implants.

What we stand for

The Socialist Party fights for socialist change – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also fight, in our day-to-day campaigning, for every possible improvement for working-class people. As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a democratic, socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

Work and income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards £10 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state

retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension. Reinstatement the link with average earnings now.

- Reject 'Welfare to Work'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

Public services

- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs – free at the point of use and under

democratic control. Kick out private contractors!

- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

Environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

Rights

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.

New workers' party

- For a new mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party now and aid the building of a new workers' party!

Socialism and internationalism

- No to imperialist wars and occupations. Withdraw the troops immediately from Afghanistan!
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and banks that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neo-liberal European Union! For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!