

WARNING: Government health 'reforms' can seriously damage your health

EQUITY AND Excellence: Liberating the NHS... so benevolently named is the government's car crash of a health bill which is going through parliament, that frankly there should be a health warning attached to it!

Jackie Grunsell

The name hides a devastating array of proposals which, if accepted, will see the destruction of the NHS as a health system.

No longer will it provide care, nationally planned, to meet the needs of each individual, without basing that on their ability to pay.

Instead it is to be replaced by a fragmented set of different health care providers competing to deliver care to another set of different commissioners, jostling to buy the services their particular patients need, with an ever-decreasing pot of money with which to do this.

The central principle of the bill is that 'any willing provider' can supply the services, including profit-making health corporations like United Health.

Primary care trusts (PCTs) and Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) will be abolished from 2013 to be

replaced by groups of GPs organised into groups called 'consortia'.

The government expects this will reduce spending on 'bureaucracy'. However the British Medical Journal estimates the cost of restructuring will be £2-3 billion for which extra funding is not being provided.

They claim GPs are best placed to make decisions about the needs of their patients.

While GPs are often very good at assessing the needs of their own practice populations they are not trained in public health nor do they generally have an overview of the health needs of an entire town or city, let alone a region or country as a whole.

Even if they did, on the basis of a reduction in NHS funding in real terms, GPs will simply end up being the ones who decide which services will be cut or rationed.

Of course it's inevitable that GP consortia will employ others to do their 'management' for them, a role for which private companies are champing at the bit. Control of the NHS's £100+ billion budget is the prize they've had their eyes on for some time.

Every NHS trust will become a foundation trust by 2013, taking it out of state control. When these trusts will no longer have a cap on

how much they can earn from private patients, it's easy to see how NHS patients, not paying directly for care, could end up at the back of the queue.

What little accountability existed in the NHS is to be stripped away. There has been no public consultation on the government's proposals despite the fact that less than half of doctors think the government's plans will improve patient care.

The top-down drive to promote a market-driven health service will actually risk increasing the inequality in health between rich and poor. Those needing unprofitable, highly specialised or expensive treatments may well be asked to pay, or at least 'top-up' the funding available on the NHS.

Fortunately all health service trade unions seem to be united in their opposition to the government's plans. Of course, words are not enough when it comes to the very future of our NHS. Action is needed now before it's too late.

Health unions need to unite in organising industrial action against this attack. They should fight alongside community groups campaigning to defend services and come together to coordinate a national campaign to defend our NHS.



The government's new health bill is a charter for private health care companies to make huge profits out of the NHS budget.

photo Paul Mattsson

whatwestandfor

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 & 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 retire-

ment pension, as a step towards a living pension. Reinstate 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!
- 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 Iraq and 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!