

ELECTION 2015:

WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR THE NHS?



**Policy priorities for the next
government**

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IN BRIEF:

The ability of the NHS to maintain an internationally recognised healthcare system of the highest quality at low cost is a testament to the commitment of NHS staff. However, the NHS has been under steady and concerted attack from marketisation culminating in the Health and Social Care Act 2012. Despite promising no top-down reorganisation, since 2010, the Coalition has implemented destructive changes to the NHS resulting in its dismantling as a public service. If the values of free and universal healthcare are to be protected, government must act to reinstate the NHS throughout England.

THE PROBLEM:

The NHS is currently going through its biggest financial squeeze in history with a £20 billion efficiency drive by 2015 and spending in real terms cut due to the higher rates of healthcare inflation. Social care funding has been slashed on average by 20% (£2.8 billion) between 2011/12 and 2013/14 whilst wasteful reorganisation could have cost up to £3 billion. The overall NHS deficit is heading toward £1 billion, with more than half of all hospitals now in deficit.

While marketisation was first introduced with the introduction of the purchaser/provider split and the use of private finance initiatives, the Health and Social Care Act 2012 has firmly wedged open the door to mass privatisation. In 3 years £7 billion of new NHS contracts have been awarded to the private sector.

Marketisation, outsourcing and the dismantling of



services is being done in the absence of planning and means that in some areas, services are underfunded and overstretched. This is made worse by an overreliance on temporary and agency staff where the regressive public sector pay freeze has caused difficulties in recruiting and retaining permanent staff.

The funding gap for adult social care over the next decade is £4.3bn and the condition of mental health services has deteriorated due to chronic underfunding and disconnection of services and treatments.

WHAT'S AT STAKE AT THE ELECTION?

This election will determine the future of the NHS, perhaps more than any other institution in British life. Of the two big parties, one promises to create a competition-based NHS, driven by private providers, and the other promises to create a care-based NHS, with public ownership at its heart.

By not protecting the NHS from the higher levels of healthcare inflation and the increasing pressures on a modern health service, the Coalition has left the NHS in a precarious financial state. People must come before profit. The next 5 years are crucial for the survival of the NHS. This is what's at stake at the General Election.

ACTIONS THAT CAN PROTECT THE NHS:

We need a government that values the principle of public service and understands the possibilities that public ownership can provide in securing excellence in the long term for healthcare - a government that cares more about the public good than profitability.

If the values of free and universal healthcare are to be protected, government must act to reinstate the NHS throughout England.

- 1. Reinstate the Secretary of State's duty to provide listed health services throughout England.** This duty is the key underpinning of the universal and democratically accountable health service and was an obstacle to complete marketisation of funding and break-up of health service delivery.
- 2. Reverse the Health and Social Care Act 2012** to prevent the fragmentation of the NHS, end the financial stress on services and prevent quality of care being undermined.
- 3. End marketisation and competition including the purchaser provider split** in order to invest in services rather than establishing a counterproductive market bureaucracy. Cooperation and planning with an increased role for local government will ensure a sustainable health service.
- 4. Abolish competition bodies** so that the role of regulators and obligations of the Secretary of State are wholly focussed on increasing provision and quality rather than competition.
- 5. Integrate healthcare** to provide comprehensive and universal care across physical, mental, social, dental and optical health which is more proactive and preventative. A health and social care service must be publicly provided, publicly owned, publicly accountable and publicly funded.
- 6. Increase funding** to meet the needs of the future and to ensure that care is better coordinated.
- 7. Exempt the NHS from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)** so that services can be protected from competition regulations. Returning the NHS to full public ownership would better protect the service.
- 8. Protect staff to maintain standards** of care. Training needs to be comprehensive and planned for the long-term. There must be professionalisation of all roles in the NHS with good quality regulation and an open culture that encourages whistleblowing and staff engagement. All NHS staff deserve a fair and decent wage and national terms and conditions must be protected.
- 9. Tackle the problem of PFI** contracts so that hospitals can be relieved from debt burdens that have ruined hospital finances and endangered patient care.
- 10. End the target driven approach** which has unnecessarily burdened hospitals with huge fines and which has put staff and services under pressure.
- 11. End the closures and mergers** so that as far as possible services can be located closer to patients' homes. The restoration of geographic planning for needs assessment would ensure services are well placed.