



NHS For Sale Authors on the NHS

Jacky Davis and David Wrigley, BBC Radio Merseyside, Wednesday 24 June, Roger Philips, during BMA conference

JD (Consultant Radiologist, North London): The NHS did not need a radical overhaul. When the Conservative party came in 5 years ago the NHS wasn't broken and it didn't need fixing. It was at its most popular ever. The outcomes were improving compared to other countries. It was a runaway success, as has been shown by international studies: the NHS is the most cost-effective and fair health service in the world.

So the Tories really had to run it down deliberately in order to explain why they were bringing in this big, top-down reorganisation that they had promised they wouldn't do.

DW (Lancashire GP): The NHS in 2010 had the highest ever patient satisfaction, lowest ever waiting times and the NHS wasn't broke. The talk about needing to bring in these changes which opened the NHS up massively to private companies. The argument used was "we've got to make changes, people are living longer, it's unaffordable". These are lies given by our politicians about our NHS.

The Labour party brought in the private sector to do a certain thing, and that was to bring waiting lists down. In 1997 my patients waited over a year for heart bypass operations, they were dying on waiting lists. In 2010 when Labour left power they were getting their heart operations done within 6-10 weeks. That was why the private sector was brought in. It made a big difference.

JD: The figures are highly misleading. Because what the Tories have done with their reforms is open the door to the private sector and to make it much easier for them to take over. For instance, GPs now have to put out tenders for all the work that they want done. Those tenders are being won increasingly by the private sector so although the figures may be low at the moment they are really going to start escalating. Because the private companies, they have the money to tender for these contracts. Individual GP practices simply can't put that sort of money into tendering. Who can do it?

The big companies. They don't necessarily, in fact almost never, have the clinical expertise they are tendering for but they win the tenders because their expertise is in winning contract tenders, they've got the lawyers, they've got the money, they win the contract and then they have to go out and start looking for the staff to do it.

They've got to make a profit out of it. How do they do that? When they take over NHS services they cut the staff, they downgrade the staff, they reduce the service that's on offer so the patients are the ones who suffer when the private sector take over as they are increasingly doing at the moment.

The NHS often is criticised for running at a loss. But when the private sector comes in, finds it can't make any money, it walks away and abandons the GP surgeries, the hospitals, the patients, for the NHS to pick up the pieces.

DW: The private sector often goes for easy operations but as they have found out, running a hospital can be very expensive. But that's what the NHS is there for.

I'm self-employed as a GP but we're miles apart from the private sector. We are in a community for a lifetime: we don't walk away when times are tough.

A myth that was perpetuated by the Tories was that we were being given control and that's just not the case at all. GPs are more involved in some of the decision making, and some of that is good, but the vast majority of decisions are taken by large board where GPs are in a minority and they all being driven by the government policy.

The big difference between the new CCGs and the old PCTs is that the CCGs are being driven by the Health and Social Care Act, which is driving privatisation.

JD: Another difference is, as we predicted, that most GPs have found they don't have the time, they don't have the expertise to do all this huge commissioning so their work is being taken over by these rather technical Commissioning Support Units or CSUs, who are now being privatised, outsourced to the very big companies like KPMG who are also involved in providing NHS care. So what's happening is you are giving the NHS budget to these huge organisations who are going to make their money not out of the clinical care, because they know that because the NHS is so efficient they can't make their money there, they are going to make their money out of running the NHS market and they are going to be buying care from other private people. An NHS market that nobody wants.

So we haven't got enough nurses, we haven't got enough hospital beds, and yet we are squandering hundreds of millions of pounds on running a market that the Scots don't have, the Welsh don't have, the Irish don't have, this is just a purely ideological thing that's present in England that nobody wants except the politicians and the private sector. No patient wants this and yet they are pushing on regardless, wasting money in a time of austerity.

One of the big myths is that the NHS is inefficient. The other one is "the NHS, we can't afford it", and we've always said if we can't afford the most cost-effective health service in the world what can we afford because we need healthcare? They told us GPs were going to be in charge, that there would be more accountability, more patient voice, they are not privatising the NHS – which is a huge myth. Because they have been very clever about it, a lot of people, including our colleagues unfortunately, do not appreciate what has happened, which is why we wrote *NHS For Sale*.

We have to start fighting back, and that includes not only our colleagues, but we are going to have to look to our patients and the public to start standing up and saying we didn't ask for this, we didn't vote for it, we don't want it and we're pushing back against it because the NHS belongs to everybody in this country. It's a great piece of social engineering that's more popular than the royal family. Yet we are losing it, death by a thousand cuts, and people are going to turn around in a couple of years time and say "where did that go to?. It's like Humpty Dumpty, it's really easy to push it off the wall and smash it up, it's going to be really difficult to put it back again. We have got a couple of years in which to save the NHS. And you've got great campaigning groups, including Keep Our NHS Public.

DW: This is not a hopeless fight. We've got to fight for our NHS which is the jewel in the crown. Across the whole world, people envy our NHS.