

Communications Report 2024

Overview

This past year has seen a change of government as the problems faced by the NHS have continued to grow. DFNHS has worked successfully with other campaign groups (chiefly KONP and We Own It) on bringing the NHS's real problems, as opposed to those promoted by the last government, to the attention of the public during the run-up to the election and on other occasions.

The new government has started to make improvements and is turning more to public consultation, which is a vast improvement, but there remain fundamental concerns about how the government perceives the NHS, which DFNHS should continue to consider and act on. These include:

1. The role of MAPs (PAs, AAs, etc) in hospital trusts and general practice. Widespread ignorance and misunderstanding about these new groups and the dangers as well as the benefits they pose remain. The political will to stop the last government's reckless expansion of these roles in a dangerous way, to save money, seems lacking.
2. The use of IT and artificial intelligence. This offers great promise for the NHS and is one of Streeting's core arguments for re-shaping service but remains an area where the current government's actions seem based too heavily on assumption. Again several groups have also expressed grave concerns about this (eg KONP) as well as DFNHS. This is an area where collaboration could be effective in being heard.
3. Overshadowing these broad areas of concern there remains the continued reliance by the NHS on the private sector and what could be a growth in its use by the NHS. This threatens to become far more than the limited 'waiting-list initiative' use at a local level, and could reach a point where, thanks to government support reflected in national policy, the private sector is in a position to dictate terms to the NHS – and risk creating a two-tier service as a result (I will outline more on this when reporting back on CHPI). This currently receives relatively little attention in the media.

Members are invited to consider these, and put forward their own ideas on them or other concerns, at AGM, so that actions over the coming year can be as focused as possible. It does seem that the new government is willing to listen – groups like ours have a valuable contribution to make.

Newsletter and media

The newsletter remains successful as a quarterly. Authors and interviews of people from outside the organisation continue to be published and add to the perspectives and discussion members have. The membership as a whole value this form of update.

DFNHS has continued to receive enquiries from national journalists. Last year this included queries from the *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail* and the BBC. With more organisations commenting on the NHS coverage tends to be spread out

more amongst them. But importantly, DFNHS continues to be regarded as authoritative. This puts us in a good position to make our points when we need to, which reinforces our reputation with journalists. We punch well above our weight.

The website remains useful as the principal online communication channel. Blogs have averaged monthly but more recently as the new government has started making plans for the NHS. I will continue this pace but more contributions are needed, please. Our 'X' stream continues to hold steady at just over 2,000 followers (good for a group of this size) and tweets are posted on any issue that relates to the group's objectives. The general quality of 'X' has degraded since taken over by Musk but DFNHS does not engage in unpleasant or baseless exchanges as policy so this does offer some safeguard against trolling or abuse.

Suggested actions

DFNHS remains in a strong position to formulate evidence-based approaches then act on them. This can be done by supporting individual members (and I will always advise or facilitate on any enquiry or request), acting on our own or increasingly in collaboration with other groups. If done effectively this will in turn bring us to the attention of more doctors, ideally when they are just getting beyond their Foundation and early-training years and are more likely to have the time to turn to wider issues.

The points of concern listed at the start of this report offer a good basis on which to act over the coming months, and seek collaboration on. We remain a 'strong voice' as a campaign group but, as the Chair's report makes plain, in order to say the right things we need to be focused. I will help any member who wishes to form a working group around points of action and support them to set this up, collaborate with other groups, promote this, and keep it running.

AT
21/10/24