

Safeguarding the Future of the NHS

Workers' Weekly Health Group

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Demonstration against PFI in Stourbridge

NHS Winter Plan:

Why Should Not the Health Workers and Professionals, Together with the Community, Decide?

THE purpose of the NHS winter plan which was unveiled at the beginning of December was to put a gloss on the crisis that the health service is inevitably facing during the winter months. Its lack of resources are an accepted fact.

Tony Blair had spoken of these plans, detailing how the government was

doing all in its power to improve on last winter's NHS performance. Nevertheless, he warned that there would be problems. However, his message was: "The NHS is a glass half full not empty." The NHS, he claimed, "is going in the right direction".

If health care were recognised as a right, there would be no question but that the society would have an obligation to keep the NHS glass full. The NHS glass is not of a fixed size, which

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Prospects for the NHS in 2001

TONY BLAIR, in his New Year message, said that investment in public services was not just a social issue but "vital to the nation's economic future".

For Tony Blair to give such a message smacks of cruel deception. In 2001 will investments in social programmes be increased and the future of the NHS safeguarded? Or is this just another one of Tony Blair's justifications for using public service investment to further serve the interests of

the private sector through measures such as the Private Finance Initiative and NHS Concordat with the private sector? According to Stephen Thornton, Chief Executive of the NHS Confederation, in a new year report,

In 2001 will investments in social programmes be increased and the future of the NHS safeguarded?

the so-called winter crisis is now actually a year-round phenomenon,

something that health managers and health workers have been saying for some time. At the same time, the government has also agreed deals reported to be worth up to £15m to transfer routine operations following its Concordat signed with the private sector and is planning £2.3 billion expansion of the PFI in the NHS.

Views on the prospects for the NHS for 2001 given by the British Medical Association

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Urgent Action Demanded on Nursing Crisis

People inside and outside of the health service are demanding action over the nursing crisis.

Retirements are now affecting the nursing levels leading to a major shortfall caused by a number of problems. In a review published by the Royal College of Nursing on December 11, Britain is shown to

be already facing a shortfall of 57,000 nurses. Research published recently from other sources shows that over the past 10 years there has been a 35% increase in nurses over the age of 50, with nearly 80,000 over the age of 55 who must retire in five years. But there is a decrease in the number of nurses under the age

of 25. A quarter of today's nurses are set to retire over the next 10 years.

Increases in the government's NHS plan will still leave a shortfall of 18,000. The situation is being compared to a timebomb ticking, which would make the present winter beds shortages pale into insignificance.

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and other professional associations and the trade unions show that it is not just the lack of some high tech procedures and lack of funding for drugs for patients. The NHS does not have enough beds, enough nurses or enough doctors. The government claims that the NHS Plan over the next three years will fund 7,000 new beds and over 100 new hospitals, 7,500 more consultants, 20,000 extra nurses. But now the British Medical Association and other bodies are openly declaring that these plans cannot be trusted. Dr Ian Bogle, Chairman of the British Medical Association, said in his New Year statement that doctors were in disbelief and felt daunted by plans for fundamental reform laid down in the NHS Plan for England. Among other things he pointed out, "Everyone knows it takes nine or ten years to train a GP, 15 years to produce a fully trained consultant." The BMA also put forward its "wish list" for the new year:

More doctors; More nurses; More beds; More time for patients with their doctors; Fewer spin doctors; No flu outbreak; Staff beginning to see the new NHS money getting through to front line services; A recognition that admissions pressures are a year-round problem; The beginnings of a strategy to tackle them; Matching investment in social services. However, what are the prospects and what should be done to safeguard the future? A recent World Health Organisation (WHO) report identifies lack of investment in training more doctors and nurses. Developing countries, which are struggling to build their own health care systems, are being targeted for recruitment of doctors and nurses. In Britain, health service managers have radically increased the number of nurses recruited from countries in Asia and Africa. The number has been boosted by 48% over the last year and

it is reported that Britain is responsible for "fuelling a global nurse shortage". The WHO report says: "If the world's public health community does not correct this trend, the ability of many health systems to function will be seriously jeopardised."

The prospects that the government has for the NHS are to step by step open up the provision of health care as a source of huge profits for private companies. Of course the monopolies and particularly the drug companies have always made huge profits from the NHS. What is different today is that the crisis in this social welfare state has been accompanied by an ideological offensive against the people's claims on society for health care, education and other social programmes. This has intensified the crisis as health workers and people refuse to accept this

agenda. Whilst the government claims it is keeping "control" of the NHS in the public sector it is expanding the "public private partnerships", the public-private sector Concordat, so as to step by step hand over the whole health care provisions to profit-making concerns.

The prospects for the people in safeguarding the future of the NHS lie in building upon their successes in refusing to accept this agenda. It is necessary for health workers along with the working and progressive people to end their marginalisation from the problems facing the health service by putting in place their own arrangements to safeguard the future of the NHS. This is also the prospect for the Workers' Weekly Health Group (WWHG) in 2001. WWHG will be working to create the conditions for these new arrangements.

Cont:NHS Winter Plan
government

resources may match or not match. To provide health care to all at the highest standard possible is a principle.

Why should the direction that the NHS is going in not be discussed by health workers and professionals, together with the community whose health the service cares for? A system where the provision of health care is decided in this manner in consultation with the workers would be a solution to the crisis in the NHS and a means to safeguard its future.

The present direction of the health service has been set to benefit private finance, as has been confirmed by the recent Concordats and the extension of PFI. Many people have elaborated the facts of the case beyond all refutation. This is not the right direction for the health service and ensures only that the NHS glass, however full, satisfies the thirst of the rich. The movement to change this direction must be developed to achieve lasting success.

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