

‘PATIENT-LED NHS’ COULD LEAD TO ‘CREEPING PRIVATISATION’

Serious challenge to health professionals, says Amicus Health

Proposals for commissioning a patient-led NHS pose the most serious challenge ever to health professionals delivering services to the community, says Amicus Health.

Amicus Health, which represents 100,000 health professionals, believes that services to patients and clients, jobs and staff pensions are under threat if the Department of Health proposals aren’t modified.

In a briefing for members, Amicus Health said: ‘Simply put, *Commissioning a Patient-led NHS* is at best a mechanism to address the continuing squeeze on primary care spending that is resulting in vacancy freezes and job cuts among care providers. At worst, it is the green light to creeping privatisation of primary care services.’

At the core of the threat to health visitors, community nurses, allied health professionals and primary care pharmacists is the plan to strip primary care trusts of their ‘provision of services’ function and give more power to GPs in a bid to provide value for money and reduce the need for hospital admissions.

Seven options for employing community staff have been proposed, including GPs directly employing all community nurses to full-scale private sector involvement. Five of the seven options pose ‘insurmountable challenges’ when it comes to protecting staff’s terms and conditions of employment.

The bottom line for Amicus is that NHS staff must be retained within the NHS: ‘This is driven by our members’ firm conviction that it is a *national* health service.’

At the same time as these proposals are being discussed, there is the more immediate threat of redundancies and job losses caused by overspending by primary care trusts during the current financial year.

Amicus will be consulting widely with its membership and other organisations before the White Paper, *Care outside Hospitals* is published in December to develop a consensus on the best way forward.

Amicus Health of Health, Gail Cartmail said: ‘Amicus is not opposed to change, but we oppose change for change’s sake. We will support proposals that secure adequate and secure expenditure for the provision of primary care services, which also have the confidence of the NHS workforce. *Commissioning a Patient-led NHS* does not meet this criteria.’

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