

EIGHT MYTHS ABOUT THE NHS

Myth 1 “We can’t afford the NHS”

YES WE CAN!

This myth is based on the claim that the increasing age of the population is posing an insuperable burden on the NHS. The unstated implication is that we should withdraw medical care from the poorer members of our ageing population and allow them to die off, while the richer ones survive with private health care!

Since this is hopefully out of the question, we need to consider the best way to meet the health needs of our whole population.

The fact is that the NHS is currently one of the most cost-effective health services in the world, coming top out of 17 countries surveyed by the Commonwealth Fund. The USA’s health care system came bottom for cost-effectiveness. The English NHS achieves its high efficacy while only receiving 8% of GDP. France spends 12% of its GDP, Germany 14% and the USA 18%. The main reason these other countries fare so badly in comparison is that they have to spend so much money on administration of insurance-based systems.

Myth 2 “Health Tourism is bankrupting the System”

NOT TRUE!

The government spreads this myth as a means of distracting us from the real cuts of £20bn that the NHS is facing. In reality, the best estimate of the cost of treating foreign nationals in the NHS is less than 0.2% of the NHS budget.

Myth 3 “The Government has no intention of privatising the NHS”

OH YES IT HAS!

All the machinery is in place for a steady privatisation of the whole of the NHS. One tenth of surgeries are already privately owned, and large contracts have already been given to companies like Serco and Virgin. In the last 10 months, over 70% of contracts signed for NHS services have gone to private providers. Admittedly the majority of services are still provided by the NHS, but at this rate the NHS will be fully privatised within the next 3-5 years unless we can stop the process.

Myth 4 “Private companies deliver better and cheaper care than the NHS”

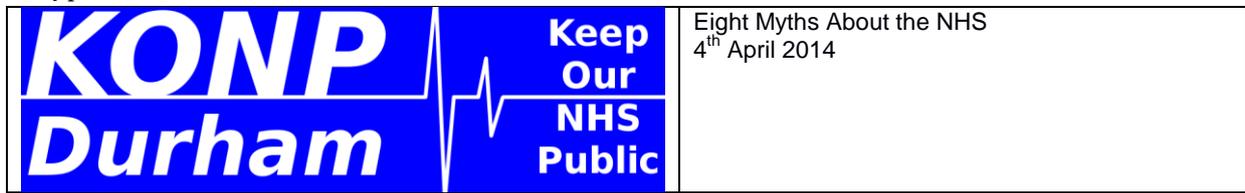
NOT TRUE!

There is not a scrap of evidence to support this assertion, and plenty of evidence to the contrary. Private companies have to make a profit for their shareholders, and they do this by cutting services once they have obtained the contract. A prime example is Serco’s contract to provide emergency care in Cornwall. They failed to provide enough receptionists or doctors, and on one occasion there was only one doctor on call to deal with the whole of Cornwall. Serco was subsequently found guilty of falsifying its data to disguise these failings.

Myth 5 “The Government’s reforms are aimed at cutting bureaucracy”

NOT TRUE!

On the contrary, simply implementing the “reforms” has cost an enormous amount of bureaucratic effort. One best-guess estimate is that this cost is approaching £3billion. Once in place, there has been a major expansion of bureaucracy involved in setting up new machinery for the tendering process. Before successive governments started the privatisation process, NHS administrative costs were close to 6% of the total NHS budget, and this was why the NHS was so cost-effective. These costs have subsequently spiralled. The House of Commons Health Select Committee found that simply administering the “purchaser-provider split” (during the days of New Labour) cost c 14% of NHS funds, and the explosion of administrative activity since the bill was passed must have put the total closer to



20-25%. More money spent on administration inevitably means less money to spend on patient care. This has already resulted in hospital closures, cuts in nursing staff and bed cuts.

Myth 6 “The reforms will give patients more choice”.
NOT TRUE!

This is simply untrue. Previously a patient or his/her GP could request a referral to a named specialist of the patient’s choice virtually anywhere in the country. This is now completely impossible as referrals have to follow contracts with local providers. Referrals are now processed through management centres where they are either rejected (one in eight of referrals are rejected currently) or redirected, by people often with no medical knowledge or training. A GP cannot even refer a patient directly to a named consultant in the local hospital.

Myth 7 “The reforms put GPs in charge”
NO THEY DON’T!

Initially, England’s GP’s were taken in by this promise. Gradually it dawned on them that they were being given responsibility without power, and the College of General Practitioners and the British Medical Association came out in strong opposition to the NHS Bill. Far from being in charge, polls show that 73% of GPs now feel they have been “set up” to take the blame for rationing health care.

Myth 8 “The reforms give power to local people”
NOT TRUE!

Again this is simply untrue. The example of Jeremy Hunt’s attempt to close Lewisham hospital is a prime example. He attempted to do this against the full weight of local public opinion. When the High Court ruled against him, saying that what he did was illegal, he simply changed the law so that next time he will be able to get away with it.

A BAREFACED LIE

After all these Myths, let us not forget one barefaced lie. Before the 2010 election, David Cameron promised the country that “there will be no major re-organisation of the NHS”. In fact, the re-organisation that is taking place is so “major” that, according to Sir David Nicholson, head of NHS England, “it can be seen from outer space”. It must have been secretly planned to take place all along. While the public are well aware that politicians often tell lies, this was a major act of political deceit of which the public should repeatedly be reminded.

CONCLUSION

The English NHS is under attack as never before. The media have failed in their duty to inform the public, many of whom do not realise how serious the situation is. When this government came to power the NHS had its highest ever popularity ratings with the public. Since then the government has pursued its own privatisation agenda at every opportunity, and has attempted to deflect criticism on to doctors and nurses by a continual campaign of aggressive negative briefing.

We appeal to you to do all you can to hold this government to account and to defend the NHS before it is too late.

(This information sheet is an abridged version (by Dr Nigel Speight) of a paper by Dr Jacky Davies, co-chair of the NHS Consultants Association, from the March 2014 Newsletter of the NHSCA)