BMA launches public campaign against NHS commercialisation

British Medical Association
Press Release
(issued Friday 12 Feb 2010)

The public is being urged to join the BMA’s ‘Look After our NHS’ campaign against the role of commercial companies providing NHS care in England.

Successive government policies have created a market in healthcare and allowed commercially run firms to compete against existing NHS trusts and GP practices to provide NHS care. The BMA is concerned that this is having an adverse impact on many parts of the NHS in England.

The BMA’s ‘Look After our NHS’ campaign website has been revamped from today (Friday 12 February, 2010), so that members of the public can show their support for an NHS which is publicly funded and publicly provided.

And next week (from Monday 15 February, 2010) the BMA is sending ‘Look After our NHS’ campaign packs to each of its members in England - over 100,000 doctors and medical students. The packs contain posters picturing businessmen taking money out of the NHS, and call on the public to “help us put patients before profits.”

Leaflets for patients, warning them that “your local GP practice, hospital or community health service could be run by a commercial, profit-driven company in the future”, will also be distributed via GP practices and BMA representatives in hospitals.

Dr Hamish Meldrum, Chairman of Council at the BMA, says:

“We want an NHS with patients, not profits, at its heart. The public values the NHS as a publicly provided, publicly funded service. Like doctors, they do not want vital funding to be diverted to shareholders.

“NHS staff see on a daily basis the waste of taxpayers’ money caused by this fixation with market ideology. Particularly as the public purse strings tighten, it is crucial that public money is no longer wasted on expensive commercial experiments.

“Doctors have already backed the campaign. Now members of the public can show politicians the extent of opposition to commercialisation of their NHS.”

The campaign packs for doctors contain a brochure warning of the impact market-based reforms are having on the NHS. It states that:

- The creation of a market in the NHS has meant an increase in bureaucracy; the number of senior managers in the NHS rose by 91% between 1995 and 2008 - more than double the increase in numbers of doctors and nurses
- Many private NHS providers have received millions in guaranteed payments for contracts, despite treating fewer patients than planned; on average, the first wave of Independent Sector Treatment Centres delivered just 85% of activity paid for - suggesting a shortfall of £220 million on the £1.47 billion contracts
- New ‘GP-led health centres’ have been costly, enjoying on average three times the funding per patient of regular GP practices, despite in some cases very few patients registering with them
- Every eight cases diverted to an Independent Sector treatment centre costs the taxpayer the equivalent of almost ten cases dealt with by the NHS
- The Private Finance Initiative is now funding over 100 new hospital schemes, valued at £10.9 billion, but set to cost the taxpayer £62.6 billion by the time the final payments are made in 2048

Notes to editors

1) View campaign materials:
Website (re-vamped site live from Friday 12 Feb - jpg of new home page available on request): http://lookafterournhs.org.uk
Campaign poster (both sides): http://lookafterournhs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads-final-text-cartoon-post...
Leaflet for public being distributed in surgeries and hospitals:
http://lookafterournhs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/public-leaflet-final-26...

2) The Look After our NHS campaign was launched to a primarily medical audience in June 2009.