

Remove politics from reforms

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The coalition Government's announcement last year that it planned to radically change the NHS came as a major surprise to both healthcare professionals and the general public as neither the Conservatives nor the Liberal Democrats had mentioned such dramatic changes to the NHS in their manifestos.

Many people, including from the coalition itself, have been very vocal about their thoughts (a lot of them negative) on the proposed changes. As a result of the debate, the Government launched the NHS Future Forum as a vehicle for listening to people's views on the reforms and for reflecting on any necessary amendments.

As time has gone on, the debate has got increasingly bitter. One newspaper reported that NHS leaders have called for people to move beyond the politics and concentrate on the practicalities of making the reforms work.¹ Minimising political interference from interested groups, such as staff and patients as well as politicians, to me seems the ideal solution for moving forward. We need to concentrate on managing the NHS and trying to make it a service that has cost effective, evidence-based, outcomes.

Obviously, as the NHS is such a massive organisation, this is not going to be easy, but that should not stop us aiming for this goal.



For example, we could have a management board in charge of the NHS. This board could follow the broad ideas and aspirations laid down by the government of the day while working within a defined budget. Therefore, such a board would work in a similar way to a board of directors in charge of a large company. Like a board of directors, an NHS management board would be responsible to “shareholders” — which would be everyone.

A key concern surrounding the NHS reforms is that they are the first step toward privatisation. This is something that Prime Minister David Cameron denies. In a speech last month, he said: “Let me make clear: there will be no privatisation.”² He added that the NHS would be free from “political control”. But as always the devil will be in the detail. Personally, I believe that the NHS should be run as a state entity, free of private enterprise, with all

services and functions provided by the NHS family (the management board I propose would be part of this family).

These are tricky and unpredictable times that lie ahead for the future direction of the NHS, and I feel that virtually everyone has a genuine interest in making sure that the NHS retains the ability to provide free healthcare at the point of delivery to everyone, funded by the taxpayer. While *how* the NHS will change is far from clear, one thing that is clear is that the NHS will change. In his speech last month, Cameron said: “Sticking with the status quo is not an option.”²

References

1. Donnelly L. NHS leaders urge: stop playing politics with front line. <http://bit.ly/iq4Cxx> (accessed 25 May 2011)
2. Number10.gov.uk. <http://bit.ly/jzBt7t> (accessed 25 May 2011)