

The Facts - Health and Social Care Bill

The White paper on Health Equity and Excellence: **Liberating the NHS** published on 12 July 2010 poses a major threat to the NHS. If these radical proposals - which did not appear in either of the coalition manifestos - are enacted when the bill is debated in the autumn, it will be the end of the NHS as we know and love it.

Published on 19 January, it is 367 pages long with 288 clauses and there is another document, the Impact Assessment, to read. The Bill had its second reading on 31 January and was passed by a majority of 86.

The private sector is delighted, seeing the opportunities of increasing their market share. As the business manager of Tribal said: This white paper could amount to the denationalisation of healthcare services in England and is the most important redirection of the NHS in more than a generation, going further than any Secretary of State has gone before.

GPs are not trained to do commissioning and will have to use managers either displaced from the NHS or from private organisations. The BMA Council has elected to take part in 'constructive engagement' with the government but grassroots doctors are unhappy, particularly hospital consultants whose expertise has been ignored.

The current proposals if passed would:

- Transfer the responsibility for the NHS from the Secretary of State for Health to a new NHS Commissioning Board.
- Abolish Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) responsible for planning services for a region and monitoring Primary Care Trusts PCTs.
- Abolish PCTs who are given government (i.e. taxpayers') money to purchase services for patients from hospitals (trusts) and other care organisations and pay for general practitioners (GPs).
- Create 500-600 groups of GPs called consortia which would take on the commissioning

(purchasing) of services. They would replace 152 PCTs.

- Force all hospitals to become Foundation Trusts (FTs) and encourage them to become employee led social enterprises.
- Encourage 'any willing provider'
- Increase the powers of Monitor (who oversees FTs) who 'will become an economic regulator, to promote effective and efficient providers of health and care, to promote competition, regulate prices and safeguard the continuity of services'.
- Reduce NHS management costs by 45% over the next 4 years.