

Many of us heaved a sigh of relief when the Con – Dem coalition promised there would be no more major reorganisations of the NHS, but our relief has proved short lived. Shortly thereafter Andrew Lansley - with indecent haste and a poor regard for our collective memory - launched a White Paper which proposes a massive upheaval in the service.

Concealed behind the usual spin about patient choice and clinicians in the driving seat is the biggest threat to the NHS since its inception. The private sector is to be encouraged through legislation to commission and deliver NHS clinical care. At the same time £80 billion of the NHS budget is to be given to GPs to buy healthcare for their patients.

Many GPs have neither the time, the expertise nor the desire to get involved with this complex process, so multinational corporations are standing by to 'help' GPs with their new role as commissioners. They will be free to buy care from other multinationals, as the government opens up the provision of NHS clinical care to 'any willing provider'. This hands the private sector potential access to 80% of the NHS budget, buying care from the private sector. Truly Dracula will be in charge of the blood bank.

Moreover, through their new role GPs are being set up to be responsible for an 'unaffordable service'. They may wonder what they wished for when they find themselves taking the blame for the cuts and closures which will be inevitable when £20 billion 'efficiency savings' have to be made.

At the same time hospitals must become foundation trusts, and thence social enterprise organisations. This will mean an end to national terms and conditions, with NHS employees becoming an endangered species. In addition the cap on hospitals' income from private practice has been removed, as have waiting time targets. Foundations trusts, whose only duty is to make a surplus, are already looking to increase their income from foreign and private patients. With bed shortages this will inevitably mean that those who can't pay will go to the back of the queue. Those who can pay will do so via insurance or out of pocket 'top ups' for the care the NHS has provided free until now. A two tier service is inevitable.

The NHS has been subject to more 'visions' than St Teresa, but the direction of travel is now clear and will be pushed through by legislation. Privatisation is stamped through this White Paper like Blackpool rock. The NHS will become a franchised brand name, buying care from competing and unaccountable private organisations. Most people know nothing other than the NHS and take free care from impartial clinicians for granted. They have been led by politicians to believe that things will improve when private sector delivers the care, but the most cursory glance across to the USA is enough to indicate that profit-driven multinational corporations do not always act in the best interests of patients. A recent Care Quality Commission report on 'Take care Now' who hired Dr Daniel Ubani, criticized them for focussing on business priorities at

the expense of governance and clinical services. We can expect to hear more of the same unless we let the politicians know that their reforms are not wanted. Mr Lansley's new catch phrase 'No decision about you without you' is already sounding hollow. Let's make it very clear that our decision is a resounding No Thanks.