

Dear Brooks Newmark (MP for Braintree, Essex),

I am writing to you to express my concerns about the Coalition's proposed re-organisation of the NHS.

As a hospital consultant working in Colchester and treating many of your constituents I had got used to the "constant change to give the illusion of progress" agenda of the previous Labour government and was hoping for at least a period of stability when the Coalition was voted in, but it seems that the Coalition are intent on yet more change.

Although I could easily criticise many of the changes brought about by the previous government, many of which seemed to illustrate their lack of understanding of what patients really want (if you ask a focus group whether they want choice they will say yes, but when people are seriously ill getting better is a higher priority than choice!) the changes your colleagues are proposing are genuinely risky.

I am anxious that they may not realise in their zeal that it really is people's lives they are dealing with!

To give you an example the cancellation of the advertising on flu vaccination has had locally a direct effect on uptake and we have had some very serious (avoidable) cases of H1N1 flu locally and nationally.

I believe that the government has *over* emphasised the need for its overhaul of the NHS.

One of the key arguments put forward by the Coalition was that we are lagging behind in terms of the number of deaths from Cancer for example. I treat patients with lung cancer and we contribute to the LUCADA national data base. If patients dying within 30 days of referral are excluded (these are late diagnoses due the delays in General Practice) then we are as good if not better than other First world countries.

John Appleby, of the King's Fund agrees with this analysis.

Handing control of much of the NHS budget to GPs in the coming years could even increase the number of such delays.

The move to abolish primary care trusts and strategic health authorities has already lead to some problems with individuals within these organisations who not unreasonably see their jobs on the line. Whatever you think of these organisations the void will lead to some predictable and unpredictable problems. Your government is very likely to find itself blamed for the deaths of patients as a result. I am not at all sure that Andrew Lansley is completely aware of how much risk he is exposing himself to in this regard.

For him to say that the changes will make the NHS more responsive is hopelessly over optimistic!

In the BMJ Prof Appleby said the government's approach revealed "only part of the story". Heart disease: the UK had had the largest fall in heart attack deaths between 1980 and 2006 of any European country.

Locally in Colchester we have done extremely well and nationally we are in line with other European countries.

Cancer: I have mentioned the LUCADA data but the governments own data show lung cancer deaths rose steadily to a peak in the UK in 1979 and have been declining ever since, whereas in France it happened much later. (Much of that decline actually occurred with the previous Tory government it must be admitted). Breast cancer deaths in the UK have fallen by 40% over the last two decades to virtually close the gap with France. Again, if trends continue, it is likely that the UK will have lower death rates in just a few years.

To say that we are currently behind other countries is simply out of date information!

It is highly likely that any dramatic change in an organisation like the NHS, however well intentioned will reverse these trends.

It is your government who will shoulder the blame when deaths rates go up just in time for the next election!

I await your comments

Yours sincerely,

Dr Tim Howes (Consultant Chest Physician)