

Co-operation and Competition Panel
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2QH

21/04/09

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you to express my concern and dismay at the increasing imposition of competition and commercial values on the NHS. Surely the worst recession we have experienced for ages, precipitated by unregulated 'free' competition in the financial sector, is a time when we should be considering the desirability of more regulation and public provision, rather than continuing to push ahead with a now widely and deservedly discredited privatisation programme. What about promoting some healthy co-operation instead? It should be in your remit, or at least you could be honest and change your name.

Operations like a national health service are not the same as selling cars and groceries. They require rational planning at national and regional level and a public service ethos to provide adequately and effectively for people's needs. Competing providers looking to maximise profits will not do this. Buying in cheap contract cleaning gives rise to infections, there is wasteful duplication of managerial and administration functions (why is it now so difficult to find out what proportion of NHS spending now goes on this rather than on treating patients?) and providers seek to cherry pick the most lucrative elements. A complex system of incentives and regulation then becomes necessary to try to ensure that provide providers actually do provide the quantity and quality of services we desire.

At the very least I urge that when considering any future changes in provision you do the following.

1. Ensure that the alternative of a publicly led service is included in consultations about future tenders.
2. Avoid as far as possible the duplication of services to produce 'choice', as this is likely to be wasteful of resources when delivering health care.
3. Ensure that the tendering process is fair and transparent, with no discrimination against NHS organisations in favour of either commercial or voluntary bodies or social enterprises.
4. Consult the public on an ongoing basis about local tenders e.g. via local involvement networks (LINKs).
5. Foster co-operation not only between commissioners and providers, but between providers, a hope expressed by Richard Taylor MP in a debate in Parliament on 24 February.

Yours sincerely,

Mr M J Pratt