

Attend NHS FightBack meeting in Bournemouth

UK: Oppose health care cuts, redundancies and privatisation of the National Health Service

Statement by NHS FightBack

11 April 2017

NHS FightBack calls on health workers, patients and local residents to attend our meeting in Bournemouth on April 23 (see details below) to oppose redundancies, the withdrawal of hospital services, rationing of treatment and accelerated privatisation of the National Health Service (NHS).

This fight must begin by opposing Bournemouth Council's sacking of 13 community rehabilitation assistants (CRA) who work for the Dorset Health Care University Foundation Trust (DHUFT) in the Bournemouth Intermediate Care Service (BICS).

The BICS team includes physiotherapists, nurses, occupational therapists, pharmacy technicians, CRAs and administration staff. They help thousands of people in the Bournemouth area. BICS is being gutted, after the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group (DCCG) announced it will withdraw £426,000 in funding.

Such is the scale of cuts that in January the British Red Cross issued an alert that the NHS faced a "humanitarian crisis," just as it said of Greece—the country that is the European Union's experiment in imposing savage levels of austerity. Cuts totalling £20 billion have been wiped from the NHS budget since 2010. Plans for a further £26 billion of cuts by 2021 are being finalised.

The latest cycle of cuts is being imposed through Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs). The implementation of further "efficiency savings" will require such a level of cuts to frontline services that the NHS will be unable to provide universal health care free at the point of use. One in six of the UK's 175

A&E (Accident and Emergency) units face closure or downgrade in the next four years.

The situation confronting the NHS in Dorset is representative of this sweeping attack.

Faced with a £158 million deficit by 2021, the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group has started a Clinical Service Review into Dorset health services. As part of the rolling out of STPs nationally, the DCCG has drawn up proposals that include:

1. Downsizing two of the three Accident and Emergency units at Dorchester and Poole;
2. Closure of the maternity unit in Poole;
3. Shutting the Special Baby Unit and Kingfisher children's ward in Dorset County Hospital;
4. Closing 8 out of 13 community hospitals and replacing them with "hubs" without beds.

Even this is not the complete picture. Under a separate Primary Care Commissioning Strategy, the DCCG has outlined plans to slash the number of GP surgeries across the county by two-thirds.

In an attempt to prevent BICS workers from making a public appeal in defence of their jobs, management has demanded "confidentiality" and threatened that non-compliance could put redundancy payments at risk. However, these threats only hold sway because the trade unions are isolating the BICS workers and enforcing management's "nine-step" redundancy process.

The GMB and Unison said nothing at the March 20 management meeting at which the redundancies were announced and have not made contact with the workers

since.

Unison, with an NHS membership of 500,000, isolated last year's junior doctors' strike, assisting the British Medical Association (BMA) to betray it. The BMA overruled the membership's rejection of a draconian contract and enforced the Conservative government's diktats.

The consequences of this defeat go beyond the inferior pay, terms and conditions enforced on junior doctors. It provided the green light for a further dismantling of the NHS.

The government's demand for a "seven-day service" was never about improving health provision, but rather providing private companies with greater access to NHS assets within the hospitals. It will allow them to cherry-pick the more profitable services and to destroy the existing terms and conditions of NHS staff.

In April, the Royal Bournemouth Hospital (RBH) opened a new private unit, including a ward, two consulting rooms and a treatment area. Managed by the Trust through its Bournemouth Private Clinic, this is only privatisation by other means. That this is promoted as a way of increasing "patient choice" is how public health provision is being transitioned towards privatisation.

The unit was built with public Trust funds to the tune of £800,000. The Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospital Trust (RBCH) argues that the money will be recouped from consultants using the facility to treat private patients, with revenue raised reinvested in NHS provision. This is a fraud. In fact, the RBCH cited the Health and Social Care Act 2012 as its model, which raised the cap on funding of Trusts through private patient care from 2 percent to fully 49 percent!

The RBCH praises other NHS hospitals with private patient units such as Poole, University Hospital Southampton and Queen Alexandra Hospital in Portsmouth, adding, "In many ways, RBH is catching up with many other Trusts."

The Sustainability and Transformation Plans and the Health and Social Care Act 2012 are fundamental turning points in a decades-long assault on the NHS, reaching back to the 1997 Labour government. It was Tony Blair who first opened up the NHS to corporate profit through the Private Finance Initiatives, which have placed a debt millstone around the neck of hospital Trusts ever since. While NHS staff and the

public are continually told there is no money for health care, PFI repayment costs now amount to £65 billion.

The election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader has not signalled any fundamental shift in Labour's position on the NHS. Corbyn has kowtowed to his party's right wing on every issue, refusing to mount any fight against its policies of imposing private health care and austerity and supporting militarism and war.

A genuine fight to defend the NHS cannot be conducted through the Labour Party or the trade unions. To fight this assault, a new perspective is required.

NHS FightBack was initiated in 2012 to begin a counteroffensive in the working class against the destruction of the NHS, including the formation of independent action committees to fight the closure of hospitals and other health facilities. The right to free, high-quality and universal health care means the fight for socialism. The interests of patients and the vital jobs of doctors, nurses and other health workers must be placed before the insatiable profit drive of the financial and corporate elite.

We urge workers to attend this public meeting to begin a discussion on the way forward.

NHS FightBack public meeting details:

Sunday, April 23, 2 p.m.

Townsend Youth Centre

Jewell Rd.

Bournemouth, BH8 0LT

For further information visit NHSFightBack.org



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact