

Health workers and residents in Bournemouth speak out against health service cuts

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The NHS FightBack campaign, initiated by the Socialist Equality Party, is fighting Bournemouth Council's plan to sack 13 community rehabilitation assistants in the Bournemouth Intermediate Care Service (BICS).

The redundancies in Bournemouth, saving £426,000, and slashing of services in the county of Dorset are part of cuts being imposed by National Health Service (NHS) Trusts nationally. These are essential to Conservative government plans to impose a further £20 billion in "efficiency savings" by 2020.

On April 23, NHS FightBack held a meeting in Bournemouth against health care cuts, redundancies and the privatization of the NHS. The meeting was attended by BICS workers, other NHS workers and local residents.

On the Saturday prior to the meeting, NHS Fightback campaigners set up a stall at a rally against NHS cuts in Bournemouth.

In contrast to NHS FightBack's perspective for a socialist strategy to be the basis for the fight against the attacks on the NHS, Keep Our NHS Public Dorset organised a "gathering" in order to put forward moral appeals to those carrying out the cuts.

The following are interviews from some of those who have spoken to NHS FightBack during its campaign.

Maureen and John are two retired nurses. Maureen said, "I was an operating theatre nurse for many years. I have worked in many different hospitals. I think everything happening with the NHS at the moment is totally wrong. The government is targeting all the wrong things. We need to protect people. It is the vulnerable people who are being damaged by these policies.

"It is all about saving money rather than giving the quality of care.

"I heard from the news that considerable cuts are to be made in Dorset including GP practices, intermediate care and community hospitals.

"What is happening with Bournemouth and Poole, with the transfer of emergency services to Bournemouth, just seems completely illogical. The patients, who live in west Dorset, west of Poole, will not get to care in time. Some of them may not survive during long travel. That cannot possibly be right.

"Patient safety has gone out of the door. Nurses and all the caring professions are struggling to provide a service. Whether they are consultants, whether they are doctors in medicine in community care social care, they are struggling. They are doing their best. Some of them are leaving because they can't provide that service."

Asked about what she thought about the 13 planned redundancies in Bournemouth, Maureen said, "I think that is totally wrong. Who are going to look after the patients in the community? There aren't other people there to do their jobs. Everybody in the system is overworked and overstretched. To make people redundant in BICS is complete nonsense. Nobody can pick up the services they provide."

Asking about the trade unions—who have done nothing to oppose the redundancies—she replied, "I think unions are not doing what they are really contracted to do. People are paying in to the unions but unions are not supporting their members the way they should."

When NHS FightBack reporters explained that the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) union had their branch meeting at the end of last year—at which they

endorsed the Clinical Service Review in Dorset—Maureen said she and John should have gone to the meeting to challenge the union leaders.

John added, “We were in the RCN for years and are very disappointed with the teeth they don’t have. Sometimes they say certain right things at the right time in the right place. Unfortunately, they go no further than that. I am very disappointed with them. Bearing in the mind it’s the nurses themselves keeping the RCN going and they are paying into it, it’s not the service you imagine it to be. When it comes to opposing redundancies, like you just mentioned, they don’t do anything. They are not interested is a nice a way to put it.”

Dino spoke to NHS FightBack and then attended the meeting it held on Sunday. He had worked as a BICS community rehabilitation assistant and later sent this statement in support of the campaign in opposition to redundancies:

“The situation which is unfolding now is unprecedented.

“Redundancies in BICS will put a lot pressure on the remaining skeleton staff and they will not be able to cover all the areas they do now. I think it will have a direct impact on acute hospital beds that are so costly and, more importantly, already under a huge strain.

“The last year has seen many protests and strikes from not just junior doctors but also from general public, who are concerned about the NHS that we care so much about. I had the privilege to work in both NHS and Social Care and have seen things from both sides. I have seen mental health services cut to the bare minimum over the last 3-4 years and Social Care funding cut significantly. This is at a time when our demographics are rapidly changing and so is demand.

“[Prime Minister] Theresa May’s repeating of the mantra that the NHS was receiving an extra £10 billion remains constant. But this was debunked by Tory MP Sarah Wollaston, who said the number was both ‘incorrect’ and ‘risks giving a false impression that the NHS is awash with cash.’

“On the other hand, the UK’s main rate of corporation tax is currently 20 percent, already far lower than France’s 33.3 percent, Germany’s 29.7 percent or Italy’s 31.4 percent. But in 2015, [former Tory Chancellor] George Osborne announced Britain’s rate would fall to 18 percent by 2020 at a cost of £6.5

billion to the taxpayer, according to documents released at the time.

“A year later—and at an additional cost of £1 billion—the government said the rate would drop to 17 percent by 2020, bringing the total cost of the phased 3 percent fall, now due to start from this April, to £7.5 billion.”

“It becomes imperative for the government to take a hard look at this before leaving our disabled, elderly folks stranded on trolleys in the corridors of A&E.”

Andrew, a district nurse in Bournemouth said, “It is disheartening to see the services crumbling in Dorset as a result of government cuts to health care.

“They disbanded community palliative services and redeployed the staff in other teams, particularly in district nursing teams. We are already stretched and sometimes have to pick the pieces up as result of the crisis in social care. So how can we give dignified care to patients who are dying? I was really angry when I heard about the redundancies in BICS. It will not only increase our workload in the community, but also we will not be able to address many aspects of services they provide as a distinct team.

“I left the RCN because they are useless and joined Unison. But Unison seems to be no different to RCN when it comes to the fight against slashing of services and our wages.”

Lisa, a nurse who works in Bournemouth Royal Hospital, noted, “I personally have not had to deal with the BICS team because of where I work in the hospital. But I know it is an important service operated in the community and I do not agree with the redundancies there. I am a member of the RCN and I do not understand why they don’t do anything about the cuts to services in Dorset. Their reps in Bournemouth hospital are supporting these cuts. The RCN supported freezing our pay rise for several years. I have voted online to fight against pay caps, but I am sure the RCN won’t do anything.”



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