



Political intrigue



Despite record spending many believe Labour has not proved itself a worthy guardian of the NHS. But could anyone else do it better? *MS* asks the Tory and Lib Dem leaders...

David Cameron, Leader of the Conservative Party

Nadia Audhali
Guest Writer

Tell us about your vision of the NHS.

When it comes to the NHS, politicians endlessly talk about structures - primary care trusts or strategic health authorities. But what it is really about... are people and their values. The patients who so depend on it...and the many thousands of people who are motivated by one thing above all else: to give patients the best possible care. The way to make it more human is to trust patients and professionals.

'Modernising Medical Careers', and asking doctors to answer inhuman internet-based questionnaires, which takes no account of the voluntary work they have done and the reasons

London- but they are being told to become a psychiatrist in Scotland. Is this treating people like human beings?

There is a simple truth at the heart of this. People come into the NHS not for the wealth and glamour but because they want to treat the ill. Politicians have got to understand that.

Where do you think the problems of the NHS stem from?

Put simply: the centre. Be it the NHS Computer, all the reorganisations, 'Modernising Medical Careers', the top-down targets: all the problems facing the NHS have come from a meddling Government with a mania for control. They just don't trust [healthcare] professionals. Instead, they spend £600 million on management consultants turning our NHS into a vast machine. They undertake

depend on it and the professionals who work in it.

What could today's medical students expect from a Conservative-run NHS?

Today's medical students are the doctors of tomorrow; and I hope that today's Conservative Party will be the Government of tomorrow. I want to categorically state that in government, the NHS will be our top priority.

We will guarantee that the NHS will continue to get the funding it needs...we will end all the pointless reorganisations and scrap the top-down targets which drive doctors mad. We will take the politics out of the NHS and give power back those front-line professionals who know best. Ultimately, I want to see all the professionals...deliver the first-class care that they were trained to do, not

Ming Campbell, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Party



Emma-Jane Smith
Editor-in-chief

What do you think of the current state of the NHS?

On a daily basis we hear words like 'crisis', 'mismanagement' and 'waste' in discussion about the NHS. People are losing faith in the health service as posts are being cut and wards and hospitals are being closed. Hospital trusts...are undermined by contradictory reforms driven from Whitehall. The top civil servant in the NHS has said that there will be up to 60 'reconfigurations' around the country. Yet the Government maintains the fiction that decisions are made by local communities. It appears that every plan for a new facility is announced by central Government and every decision about closures is a local decision. This is selective localism. Decentralise the bad news, centralise the good news.

What approach would the Liberal Democrats take to the NHS?

We must redefine the balance of power and accountability in the NHS. Under Labour, too many decisions in the health service are taken from Whitehall. Local people who are unhappy with the way that health priorities are set have no locally accountable body to turn to: There is a democratic deficit in healthcare.

I have met many people worried about cuts to their local health services. Thousands of people have protested to no avail. There is no meaningful debate about the future of local services, when changes are imposed from above. People have learned that 'consultation' is nothing more than a legal requirement before pre-determined decisions are implemented.

Liberal Democrats believe that local people should have a stronger voice in their local NHS. There is a growing view that the NHS is just too vast for a model in which so much is directed from the centre. We need to learn the lessons from other European countries. In Denmark, where health services maintain popular support, the service is organised on a county basis.

Decision-making should be decentralised to democratically accountable local bodies. Consultation with local people and clinicians must directly influence local health services at an early stage of the process. This would give local communities a sense of ownership over the difficult decisions facing their local health services. By ensuring that local communities are part of long term NHS planning in their area, any changes in the location of service provision would better reflect the needs of the area. This would give us back our NHS.

What is your take on the current MTAS situation?

It is essential that the Government regains the confidence of the medical profession. This has been undermined by the MTAS debacle. Patricia Hewitt's recent apology does not change the fact that the Government had plenty of prior warning of this avoidable mess. Once a recruitment process is shown to be fatally flawed and unfair you cannot remedy it. If you are in a hole, stop digging. The recent security breach of personal data belonging to junior doctors has only added insult to injury. We have written to the Information Commissioner asking him urgently to investigate the matter. As well as being an apparent breach of the Data Protection Act, Patricia Hewitt admitted in the House of Commons to my colleague Norman Lamb that she is unable to tell us if the security breach amounted to a criminal offence. We now know that 6,000 graduates' personal details were accessible on the MTAS website. This is simply unacceptable.

We support Remedy UK's calls to scrap the MTAS scheme. A genuinely fair and properly thought-out system must be introduced. The Government must also increase the number of training posts to avoid significant unemployment amongst hospital doctors.



James Meleis, RUMS

why they entered the profession in the first place, embodies this cold and callous culture.

You spoke at the RemedyUK rally in March - what were your thoughts at the time?

It was at the same time inspiring and depressing. Inspiring to see 12,000 junior doctors march in unison and show that enough is enough. But it was also depressing because here we had some of our most skilled people, driven by the noblest desire, that to help, utterly demoralised because of the way the Government has treated them: the promised training posts that do not exist; the application process that does not acknowledge the passion for their job. I spoke to one junior doctor whose dream it is to become a surgeon in

senseless and often contradictory reorganisations without consideration of who it affects: abolishing the independent NHS Executive and putting the Department of Health in charge [for example]. And along the way forcing people to re-apply for their own jobs. It would be laughable if it wasn't so damaging to morale and so harmful to patient care.

Second, what about all their top-down targets? These put political priorities ahead of clinical ones. I have heard it called the death of discretion: where doctors are not allowed to think for themselves and instead are having to meet some directive to please some pen-pusher in Whitehall. This is ripping the soul out of the NHS: the people who are really suffering are the patients who

be dictated to by far-removed management consultants or civil servants in Whitehall.

What is your take on the current MTAS situation?

We put an urgent question in parliament to get the Government to explain just what they are doing to sort out MTAS. I was there to see Patricia Hewitt's response - there was no apology, no hint of regret. Together with [Shadow Health Secretary] Andrew Lansley, I want to see a full review into the deficiencies of the system. If it cannot be repaired, it has to be scrapped. What's more, the Government promised every junior doctor a training post. Make no mistake: we will hold them to that pledge.



Campbell (centre) celebrates a council victory after the May local elections