

Private Finance Bill would spell the end of an NHS focus for health trusts

Radical Statistics Health Group.

The Radical Statistics Health Group has jointly issued an urgent briefing on the NHS (Private Finance) Bill which is currently going through parliament. The Bill would make it possible for any NHS trust to engage in PFI arrangements for 'the provision of services in connection with any of its functions'. The briefing points out that trusts with PFI schemes have had their functions redefined, removing any responsibility to act as NHS providers. In conjunction with the new legislation, this creates the possibility of unrestricted commercialisation of NHS trusts. We call for trusts to be explicitly tied to furthering the aims and provision of the NHS.

The briefing is jointly from the NHS consultants Association, the NHS Support Federation and Radical Statistics Health Group. The same authors published an article in April in the British Medical Journal with the following summary points:

- The private finance initiative (PFI) is intended to attract private finance for public sector projects, such as roads and hospitals.
- Several hospital schemes under the initiative are at an advanced stage of planning and include bed reductions of 25-30% in acute specialities.
- Because of private sector involvement and "commercial confidentiality" information on schemes and their planning assumptions is often not publicly available.
- Where data are available they suggest that the assumptions in these plans about clinical activity, throughput, and beds are out of line with recent trends and with health authorities' own projections.

- As a result of the private finance initiative an important part of health care "planning" - of clinical services - is now being done not by health authorities but by the private consortia that are making the bids, with no involvement of clinicians or public health professionals.

(Taken from 'What happens when the private sector plans hospital services for the NHS: three case studies under the private finance initiative'. Allyson Pollock, Matthew Dunnigan, Declan Gaffney, Alison Macfarlane, F Azeem Majeed, on behalf of the NIIS Consultants' Association, Radical Statistics Health Group, and the NHS Support Federation; 26 April 1997, British Medical Journal, vol 314, pp1266-1271) See news section for more information.

