

Primary Care

NEWS

Don't ignore primary care staff, says UNISON

Employers cannot ignore staff and trade unions when developing proposals on primary care provider services, according to guidance issued by the Department of Health (DH).

Although all primary care trusts (PCTs) should by now have agreed in principle what future organisational forms they will use to provide community health services under the government's Transforming Community Services programme, the DH expects staff and trade union engagement to continue.

The recent DH document, 'Transforming Community Services: The assurance and approvals process for PCT-provided community services', includes tests on staff engagement and staff support that strategic health authorities must use to assess PCT proposals.

The deadline for PCTs to submit their initial proposals for their provider services was 31 March 2010. The timetable has been extremely tight and over the last few months UNISON has been pushing hard for all PCTs to stick to the government's policy that the NHS is the preferred provider of services and to ensure that staff and trade unions are being fully consulted throughout the process.

UNISON has concerns that in some trusts the rush to meet the deadline has meant that staff engagement regarding PCT proposals has been reduced to a tick-box exercise. Local UNISON activists and officers are demanding that PCTs meet their obligations to consult meaningfully with staff and trade unions, as outlined in the DH guidance. In PCTs where staff engagement has been poor,



UNISON is seeking assurances from strategic health authorities (SHAs) that proposals will not be agreed until further staff engagement has taken place.

Throughout England, PCTs are making very different decisions about how they aim to organise the provision of services. UNISON has campaigned strongly for PCTs to choose options that keep staff and services in the NHS, such as continuing to directly provide services. Others are looking at merging with nearby PCTs or transferring services into acute hospitals or local authorities.

In more worrying proposals, some PCTs are planning for certain services to be sliced off and handed over to private companies or GP-led consortia. Some PCTs are looking at transferring all staff into large social enterprises or putting all

services out to tender and leaving it to private companies to pick and choose how local community services will be delivered. UNISON is worried that these proposals will mean that staff terms and conditions may suffer - staff may no longer be eligible to remain in the NHS pension scheme and may lose their right to training and career development.

If you work in a primary care trust, your employer should be engaging with staff now. They should be providing you with clear information on their proposals and outlining the impact it will have on staff. If you haven't heard about what plans your PCT is making then talk to your UNISON branch contact to see how you can get involved and raise concerns with your employer. Find out what's going on in your trust and make your voice heard.

What's happening in PCTs around England

Harrow and Ealing

In London, Harrow PCT and Ealing PCT are merging with Ealing Hospital to form an integrated care organisation (ICO) known as London Westside Healthcare, which is planning to become a foundation trust.

Eddie Jagers, UNISON regional officer, said: "This new organisation goes to the heart of healthcare for London and is robust enough to meet the challenge of fighting off privatisation. UNISON, together with other health unions in the three existing organisations, is working closely in partnership with the employer to ensure services, especially community services, are maintained in the NHS."

West Essex

Lynn Ginn, UNISON branch secretary at West Essex PCT was "absolutely delighted" when her employer announced that more than 75% of the staff had said no when asked if they wanted to become a social enterprise. This result followed a lot of hard work from local UNISON stewards and officers.

"Our aim was to make sure staff fully understood the impact that the creation of a social enterprise would have on their jobs, pensions and terms of employment and the ability for local health services to remain within the NHS," said UNISON regional officer, Nick Bradley. "Managers made it very difficult for us to distribute information to staff. So we resorted to old-fashioned methods – turning up at workplaces, distributing newsletters and setting up our own website. As a result we have recruited new stewards and members have contacted us asking for meetings in their workplace. The outcome in Essex is still unclear but whatever happens the good news is that union membership and organisation has been boosted by our work and we will be a match for any employer."

'Slicing and dicing' of NHS is high on conference agenda



Concerns about 'slicing and dicing' the NHS as a result of the government's Transforming Community Services programme are high on the agenda at the annual UNISON health conference, taking place this month in Brighton. Other motions to be debated praise the government's 'NHS as the preferred provider' policy, but stress that its implementation needs to be closely monitored to avoid staff and services being moved out of the NHS into private companies and social enterprises. The conference debate will help to shape UNISON's future policy and strategy on these important issues.

The conference programme also includes focus events on service reviews and productivity, sessions looking at health and well-being at work and staff training and development. More details on these and other events can be found in the conference guide.

UNISON is working on new guidance to assist members and UNISON branches with the Transforming Community Services programme. Look out for the information on UNISON's health group stand at health conference or from unison.org.uk/pct.




Million Voices campaign moves up a gear

UNISON is determined to speak up for public services. That's why we're launching the latest phase of our Million Voices for Public Services campaign with a whole range of publicity designed to get people to join our campaign and support local services.

We've produced a new campaign film which shows people the effect that public service cuts would have on their vital services. And our new web pages mean people can click on a map and

see where cuts could hit their community. Most importantly, we want people to add their voice to our campaign on the website and spread the message.

Visit the new site at unison.org.uk/million to watch the film, add your voice and leave a personal message about why we should defend public services. Look out for the Million Voices stand at conference.



IT'S NOT JUST HIS SKILLS THAT COULD BE LOST.

IT'S CRUCIAL SECONDS.

Public service cuts are hitting the headlines, and they could hit you and your loved ones too.

When spending cuts hit public service workers, it's not faceless bureaucrats who lose their jobs, but dedicated, caring people who you rely on to look after your local community's health, safety, education and environment. Just think of the consequences of losing paramedics, child protection workers and probation officers. But don't forget the less visible people looking after everything from the drains and lights in your street to care homes and baby clinics. Lose public services and everyone in your community loses.

Don't wait till they've gone to defend them.

To see where **PUBLIC SERVICE CUTS** could hit your local community enter your postcode at million-voices.org

Join UNISON at unison.org.uk/join

UNISON
the public service union

a million voices for public services

Personal health budgets under the microscope

Twenty primary care sites have been chosen to take part in an in-depth evaluation of personal health budgets in the NHS. The in-depth sites are among 70 sites across England that are piloting the budgets.

While UNISON supports the principle that everyone should have independence, choice and control over their own care and support arrangements, we are concerned that personalisation

has become synonymous with increased privatisation and fragmentation of the NHS.

UNISON members involved in any of the 70 pilot sites, in particular the 20 chosen for the in-depth evaluation, are urged to engage in the ongoing testing of personal health budgets. If you are in a pilot site, please email health@unison.co.uk. The union will be collating information nationally to build

a picture of what is happening around the pilot sites.

We have concerns around the scope and take-up of personal health budgets, risk management and staffing issues as well as the fear that personal budgets could lead to means-testing, patients 'topping-up' care with their own money and poor terms and conditions for staff. More information is available at unison.org.uk/pct

How can you keep updated on changes in primary care?

Join us – together we are stronger. UNISON offers unequalled protection and benefits to members. Call us on 0845 355 0845 now or visit unison.org.uk/join

Get in touch – tell us about any planned changes in your workplace and help us distribute information like this newsletter to your colleagues. To contact your local UNISON representative, call 0845 355 0845

Primary Care Contacts e-network – If you are a UNISON representative or branch contact in a primary care site and would like to receive updates on the latest national developments, please email your contact and workplace details to primarycarecontacts@unison.co.uk



a million
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Putting the brakes on NHS privatisation

UNISON has successfully campaigned to get the government to change tack and agree the NHS must be the 'preferred provider' of healthcare services.

This helps us put the brakes on privatisation – but the threat hasn't disappeared. Privatisation is still a real possibility and could have serious implications for your job security and the future of the services you provide.

If your PCT is threatening to privatise your service, report this to your UNISON branch. UNISON will challenge its actions - we want to protect you and the health services you provide.

If you want to help us, join UNISON today and be part of our campaign. Go to unison.org.uk/join or ring **0845 355 0845**.

Together we're stronger

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