



8 July 2015

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt
Secretary of State for Health
Department of Health
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Dear Secretary of State

Proposed Transfer of Primary Care Services from NHS England to Capita

I am writing to you on behalf of UNISON to express our grave concern and disappointment at the decision of NHS England – supported by the Department of Health - to conclude contract discussions with Capita transferring all primary care support services to them for up to 10 years.

Our Union has large numbers of staff working within Primary Care Support Services and has been in very detailed discussions about this service with NHS England since it came into existence. Our frustration is that the staff who worked within this service agreed that it had not been updated for many years and it needed time, leadership, new equipment and organisation to make more efficient.

NHS England knows that UNISON and its members were prepared to work with such a reorganisation and had demonstrated that in many meetings over the last two years. Staff were fully involved in talking to their managers about the changes needed to deliver a service. The decision to pass the entire service to Capita is in our view a very risky one for staff and more particularly for patients and all those who benefit from the PCS services.

Ensuring that all England's GPs, opticians, dentists and pharmacists are properly paid for the services they provide is of great significance to the NHS. The safe movement of patient medical records is of vital importance. At any one time PCS staff are looking after 3 million patient records. Keeping this secure and under the direct control of NHS managers is important for patients. The centralisation of services and keeping large amounts of personal data on NHS patients in England secure is in our view made riskier by the NHS sub contracting this service to other organisations.

Currently, PCS services provide screening services to patients and that is of critical importance in tackling, for instance, various types of cancer and then getting treatment early to patients. That people receive the correct information speedily and securely is essential.

Whilst it is acknowledged the PCS services are not directly clinical functions they are carried out diligently and safely by existing NHS staff. Just because they are administrative functions does not diminish their importance or significance to the NHS in England. In our view the much safer option would have been to support a proper nationally organised in house reorganisation of the service. That would have maintained NHS control and given assurances about protecting the integrity of the services.

There has been no consultation with the public in England over transferring patient medical records into a private company – nor has there been any public consultation over the transfer of screening services to the private sector. The decision by NHS England to recommend the award of a huge contract to Capita was made at a secret, closed meeting over which no documents, papers or information have been made publicly available. It is wrong that decisions on the transfer of large services and staff to the private sector are made in closed, private meetings without any public scrutiny or indeed knowledge. Even the staff who work in the service have been excluded from information about the meeting and how and why it made its decision.

Clearly Capita are bidding for this contract to make themselves a profit – if your managers had chosen to support the in house option they would have saved monies, diverting any surplus to the NHS itself not to shareholders, and protected NHS services and the integrity and privacy of NHS patient records. Indeed, at a meeting last week Capita stated they would be making a profit from this service as early as Year 3 of the contract. Those profits will not remain within the NHS.

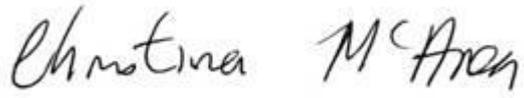
This decision to award the contract to Capita certainly does not feel right to us and if it goes ahead we feel that at some time – next year, two years or four years time – there will be a serious mistake of some sort with loss of critical data or incorrect payments either of which would undermine patient and public trust.

I am writing to urge you to reconsider this decision to award the PCS contract to Capita. There are very capable and well respected managers currently leading this service who could deliver the savings you seek and more in the views of the staff – some 1500 of them who do this work. It is believed that Capita intend to close down the vast majority of local offices (thus losing the local service contact which is so important) and to operate the service with a hugely reduced workforce. There are immense risks inherent in this approach apart from the redundancy of hundreds of long serving NHS staff.

Capita are promising to invest in new technologies – there is a poor track record in the NHS of private companies promising huge benefits from technology driven solutions resulting in over runs and escalating costs. This government needs to consider this very carefully before supporting this venture.

Our Union is asking if you could intervene with NHS England to explore whether this service should and could remain directly part of the NHS because of its importance to basic but essential services. The repercussions to the NHS in England if this very complex contract was to fail would be extremely serious.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina McAnea". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christina McAnea
National Secretary, Healthcare