



Lewisham

Issue 9 (16 February 2013)

Hospital Worker

A Workers' Liberty healthworkers' bulletin

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When cuts come, do we have the right to resist?

Bruce Keogh, the NHS's Medical Director, has come under fire from our consultants for some dodgy "clinical" advice he gave Jeremy Hunt. (He told him that closing the A&E will save 100 lives a year!)

Hunt then used this advice as justification for implementing Kershaw's plans. The consultants have asked for an explanation, pointing out that he is bound by the same professional standards as they are. We hope they pursue him and get him hauled up in front of the GMC. But our professional code of conducts may also give us a legal basis for defying the closure plans.

Huge meeting to fight Whittington cuts

Lewisham is no longer alone in mobilising massive numbers of people to defend the NHS. Over 550 people turned out to a meeting last Tuesday to defend the Whittington Hospital.

On 23 January, bosses at Whittington Hospital agreed a plan to sell off land and buildings worth £17 million, cut 570 nursing and admin jobs, reduce bed numbers from 300 to 177, cap the number of births at 4,000 and reduce the number of specialist treatments available at the hospital.

In 2010 Whittington Hospital faced a threat to their A&E. It was an election year and a successful community campaign was able to get the then Labour government to back down. The struggle to save our NHS is beginning to take shape across London.

10,000 people marched in Ealing last September. We had our own 25,000 strong march — the biggest march to save a local hospital in the history of the NHS. Whittington will likely have a similar size mobilisation.

London is on the move to defend the health service from this vicious government. If we can link up this movement then anything is possible.

Downgrading the A&E and maternity services will put our patients lives at risk. Management are saying that they won't close anything until adequate provision is in place elsewhere. But with each passing week, they are coming under increasing pressure from on high. If they do stand strong and defy the government, then they may be replaced by more ruthless managers. However it plays out, within the next few months frontline staff are likely to receive orders to start implementing the cuts.

CONFLICT

Those orders will be in conflict with our duty of care to patients. When this happens we will be put in a difficult situation.

We can either follow management orders and risk losing our PIN, or make a judgement based on the best interests of our patients, defy management and risk disciplinary action. Each of us will have to make a decision. But saying "my manager told me to do it" is no justification in the eyes of the NMC or GMC. And there is little job security at the moment anyway — the last thing we need is to be struck off the professional register as well!

The government have put us in this uncomfortable situation by prioritising the wonga-style PFI debt over patient safety. They are sacrificing human lives for the profit of a few exceedingly rich individuals. There is no clinical justification for their closure programme; as trusted health professionals we should take no part in it.

When you get home tonight we suggest you brush off your old copy of the NMC Code of Conduct or Good Medical Practice and let's get a conversation going about how we, the staff at Lewisham Hospital, can collectively commit to the highest possible professional standards — regardless of what plans they are cooking up for us in the corridors of power!

LHW provides a forum for staff at the hospital to tell their stories and air their views. If you have a story to tell or an opinion to share then get in touch. The bulletin is edited by healthcare professionals and we will ensure confidentiality is upheld.



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Maternity must stay!



Jeremy Hunt wants to get rid of the obstetrician-led maternity unit and leave the hospital dealing with just 10% of births in the borough. But where will all the women go?

Last year King's closed its doors to expectant mothers on seven separate occasions. We had to close our unit on three occasions. Statistics from the Greater London Authority predict that by 2016 (the year after the predicted closure) 5,163 babies will be born in Lewisham — that's 1,000 more babies than in 2006.

Lewisham has a high proportion of high risk births. The

obstetricians' response to the Kershaw report estimate that around 2,400 births a year are in the highest risk category. And much of this risk is unpredictable. While many women in the low-risk category would prefer a midwife-led service, they generally want to know its safe and emergency treatment is there if they need it.

Government cuts have already hit women harder than men. This attack on our maternity service is another assault on women alongside cuts to child tax credit, community resources and largely female-dominated public sector jobs.

When all the equipment and expertise exists in Lewisham to provide over 4,000 safe births a year are we really going to allow the government to lock the doors and leave the women of Lewisham queueing up outside overstretched maternity units miles across the city?

Fill the vacancies!

Nine staff have left Chestnut ward since October.

It's a big ward with a big team, and these people may have all left for completely unrelated reasons, but it does feel like they may have jumped ship due to the TSA report.

We are the lifeblood of this hospital and if we start leaving then the government has won. We have strong support in the community and there is a will for this hospital to stay put with a fully functioning service. We can play a crucial part in making sure that happens by staying in post and continuing to serve our patients.

Management are filling vacancies where they arise. But if you notice unfilled vacancies on your ward then make sure to ask in a team meeting when it is going to be filled.

A fully staffed hospital is harder to close down than one run by agency staff.

Cuts already hitting

A&Es

A&E waiting times have hit a 10 year high across the country.

According to a report from health thinktank King's Fund, 230,000 patients waited longer than four hours in A&E in the last three months.

All this is taking place before any A&E departments have closed down. The government has plans for closing 20 A&E departments across England, 10 in London alone.

The Department of Health has responded to this report by saying it is thinking of scrapping the four-hour target. The message is clear. The government is happy for doctors and nurses to be sacked, A&E departments to be mothballed and waiting times to go up.

But we need to stick by our patients and not allow lives to be lost.