



Lewisham

Issue 15 (17 April 2013)

Hospital Worker

A Workers' Liberty healthworkers' bulletin

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Ready to merge?

Although some of Hunt's measures are on hold for the time being, the Trust is keen to implement the merger with Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Woolwich.

The consultation on the new management structure is coming to an end, job descriptions are being written, and recruitment to some of the new posts will begin later this month.

We're not against mergers per se. The NHS functions as a collaborative network. There have to be links between different hospitals for the health service to function. But this merger isn't driven by a desire for greater integration. The government is not in favour of greater integration— their desire to privatise the NHS will fragment the health service.

Traditionally, mergers are used as a way to reduce staffing. So far, hundreds of people in the QEH are facing redundancy. They have been told that there will be some duplicated posts and we do not need two post holders. Even if this is true (and isn't simply a trick to double the workload of those remaining) our day to day experience of being rushed off our feet suggests we need more staff not less!

These redundancies are under the authority of the Trust Special Administrator (now Caroline Taylor). The management at Lewisham have had no say in how these redundancies are being managed. Hundreds of staff have received invitations to opt for a 'mutually agreed redundancy scheme'. Rumour has it this invitation has even been offered for staff in posts that Lewisham are actively recruiting to. As this money comes out of the joint trusts budget, we will end up paying twice over - making redundancy payments to current QEH staff then spending more money re-recruiting in Lewisham!

Although mergers can be sometimes make clinical sense, the main impact so far has been that a section of staff have found their workload increased as they have to plan for services in the QEH as well as at Lewisham. Maybe in the end the merger will improve things for some, but at the moment it's a major source of uncertainty. There is the risk that when the two organisations join, it will be easier to cut services in Lewisham, in the pretence that something just as good will be available at QEH.

Staff at QEH have been clearly labelled as less worthy than us here at Lewisham. It has been made clear that where posts are duplicated, it will be the Lewisham post holder who keeps their job. This is no way to promote good working relations across a new organisation. Staff at QEH must feel that Lewisham are stealing their jobs, while we worry the merger with QEH could threaten our services.

We need to take every opportunity to open up the lines of communication with our colleagues in the QEH our organisations draw closer together, and support one another as union members to organise a fight for all our services as well as our jobs.

Bank Holiday blues

While many people, like me, made the most of the long weekend to spend time with our families, there's still little escaping the increased workload when we get back.

For those of us who had to work through the long four day shut down, it's been worse than Christmas. As many of us had children off school over the holidays, members of teams take it in turns to take bits of annual leave to fill in the child care gaps at home. Consequently, we're left with half the staff. In outpatients we're trying to fit 10 days worth of appointments into 8.

It all just shows, again, that patients don't get well for the holidays and we're already cut to the bone. There isn't the slack in the system to cover the extra work generated by the bank holidays and allow time for staff to take necessary annual leave. Even when we do get a break, we still come out the other end feeling five years older.

Except for the tiny minority like my manager who managed to take the whole fortnight off! It says something about who's job's more important!

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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Nurse Karl

With his finger on the pulse of industrial unrest, our bearded band 5 answers your questions...

Dear Nurse Karl,

I don't care too much about Maggie Thatcher but I do think dancing on her grave is going a bit too far.

Shouldn't we let her rest in peace?

Yours, Jim

Hi Jim,

Thatcher's death after years of incapacitating old age brings no relief to the working class.

There would have been better cause for celebration if she had died 29 years ago, strung up by miners victorious in their 1984 strike. Or, better, 33 years ago, if the steel workers' strike of 1980, the first big workers' struggle against her government, had been conducted militantly and driven her from power.

Before Thatcher's years in office, 1979 to 1990, Britain was an unequal and exploitative capitalist society, but much less unequal than now. The Gini measure of inequality rose from 26% in 1979 to 37% in 1990. Inequality had decreased a lot between the 1930s and the late 1940s, but now a steady upward trend seems normal.

Before Thatcher, beggars and homeless people were rare on the streets of London. After a few years of her government, they were common.

Before Thatcher, most people thought the NHS and the welfare state was as



She hated us

established a fixture as the abolition of slavery or serfdom. She started the axing-back which the current government continues.

Trade union rights were also considered a fixture. But by 1997-2010 we had a Labour government which regarded the Tories' huge curbs on workers' basic rights to withdraw our labour and show solidarity as a law of nature, not to be disturbed.

Whilst demonising the poorest in society, she raised mean-spirited individualism as the highest virtue.

Her taxpayer-sponsored funeral will be an opportunity for the ruling class to gloat over their victory over our class. We need to rebuild our movement to bury Thatcher's politics.

Solidarity, Nurse Karl

Austerity is bad for your health!

New research has found a biological mechanism linking loneliness and social rejection with long-lasting changes in genes that trigger chronic inflammation, leading to increased risk of heart attacks, depression and cancer.

A report in the *New Scientist* (13 April 2013) suggests that this effect may be intergenerational with high levels of prenatal anxiety affecting long-term child development. The economically illiterate austerity policies are a direct assault on our health and wellbeing.

As healthworkers we should take our public health responsibilities seriously and use evidence-based practice — we need to build a working-class movement capable of challenging austerity.