



Lewisham

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Hospital Worker

A Workers' Liberty healthworkers' bulletin

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We won! Victory for Lewisham!



On 31 July, a High Court judge ruled that Jeremy Hunt had acted unlawfully in ordering the closure of Lewisham Hospital's A&E and maternity unit. The ruling slammed the brakes on the closures. We won!

The Save Lewisham Hospital campaign warned us in advance the announcement would be at 11:30am; a tweet went out at 11:37, and by midday everyone in the hospital that I could find already knew the result. Lots of friends and family texted me to congratulate me, and throughout, hospital staff have been commenting in wonder at how the "little people" have won. Everyone remarks about how proud they are of Lewisham.

Funnily, people seem a little nervous of taking the credit. It was the campaign that won, it was the people of Lewisham. Colleagues, it was all of us, we did it, us! The tens of thousands of people on our historic demonstrations did it. We didn't need anyone else coming in to do this for us — we campaigned, and fundraised, and refused to rest and accept Hunt's decision.

INFLUENCE

We could never really hope to influence or second guess a judge. Maybe he was influenced by our passion, maybe he was annoyed by the government's reforms of the legal system, or maybe the government just clearly made a whopping great legal error.

But whatever the outcome, we would never have been in a position to take this case in the first place if it were not for the financial and campaigning support of thousands of people.

This is a significant victory; the reverberations are being felt up and down the country, including in the corridors of power.

But the fight is far from over. We know already the government is planning to appeal the High Court decision.

NHS England had Lewisham marked as one of nine A&Es in London that should close. The fight is still on, and the campaign is already planning a demonstration in Lewisham in September, as well as having a presence at both Labour and Conservative party conferences.

They are right to do so. Time and time again, the local community will show that they are determined to keep our hospital. This public support heartens us here in the hospital. Even though the fight isn't over, the High Court victory shows us that we can force the government back.

These last few days, we've been smiling at each other in the corridors, and patients have been telling us how pleased they are about our victory. But we know the fight is still on. Tim Higginson has warned us that even if the judgement stands and the appeal fails there will be changes at Lewisham.

The threat from government has receded by a few months' distance at least, but we must be wary of our own management too, and note carefully what happens as we merge.

We know that things can be changed, that we have some power now. But we, as workers in the hospital, have a special, unique power beyond the general potential power of the community campaign. We know how to run this hospital, because we *do* run this hospital. We are the people who make it function, day in, day out.

Continued overleaf



**Workers' Liberty London's Summer Gathering:
Socialism and problems of everyday life**

**Sunday 25 August, 1-6pm in New Cross (ring
07855 156290 for venue details)**

•Socialism and human nature: are human beings just too lazy, anti-social, selfish or nasty to make socialism work? •What's wrong with our schools? Is it possible to make education free and fair? Are kids always going to get detentions and homework? • How we can deal with racism and sexism in our everyday lives?

As well as learning and discussion, there will be food, film, socialist books and games and fun activities for children.

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. All articles are published anonymously and we will ensure confidentiality is upheld. Email hospitalworkerbulletin@gmail.com

If cuts are to be beaten back for good, we need to learn our unique power as workers to change and take control of our workplace.

We need to learn together, we need to plan. We have organisations to help us do this. Used properly they can help us fight, not just on the grand level of fighting cuts and closures but on a daily level of helping resist and reverse little injustices in the workplace. These are our unions, our staffside, and though Unite is currently leading the way in actively opposing cuts and supporting the campaign, all the unions need to work together, so we as a group of staff can stand together and protect ourselves and the services we provide.

If we can learn to communicate and work together for ourselves, just as we work together every day to provide our services, then we can do even more. Because we cannot be satisfied, surely with saving the status quo. We need to improve it, we should all be able to be truly proud of the services we provide — top-quality, free, public healthcare.

Hunt's legal blunder was part of the Con-Dem project to reform the NHS, and public services in general, in the interests of profit. We have set that project back with our win in the High Court. But to derail it entirely, we must counter it with our own project to remake society in the interests of human need.

And to do that, our unions must become organisations that can fight for a government that will serve workers' interests as much as this government serves the interests of the rich.

This week's win should galvanise us in that fight.

Join a union!

Trade unions are collectives of workers in a given workplace or industry that allow workers to fight together for better rights and conditions at work.

The backing of Unite, Britain's biggest union, has been essential for the Save Lewisham Hospital campaign. But unions are vital for us day-to-day too. More so than professional associations or any other body, they allow us to stand together and raise a collective voice for how we think our workplaces should be run.

Lewisham Hospital Worker supports the current drive by Unite to organise at the hospital. Join online at unitetheunion.org

CCGs' multi-million shortfalls

The new system of running the NHS and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) is already heading for a funding disaster.

Some CCGs are facing multi-million-pound shortfalls as specialised commissioning and social care take huge bites out of their budgets.

CCG leaders have said that their allocations have been reduced by up to £4 million at a stroke, after funding was removed to cover specialist commissioning at hospitals and health and wellbeing boards ringfence funding for social care.

Uncertainty over funding could lead to plans to improve local services — such as end-of-life care and better integration of services — being abandoned.

The fights elsewhere

The Lewisham court victory needs to be something that other campaigners can take inspiration and build on. Here are some of the ongoing battles...

Mid Staffs

The Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust went into administration on 16 April after a report concluded it was not "clinically or financially sustainable", following critical failings at Stafford Hospital.

But on 20 April, 50,000 people marched against threatened cuts and closures at the hospital. They did not want to lose the buildings and service provision there.

On 31 July the administrator recommended a series of cuts very similar to those at Lewisham and these will now be put to a public consultation to run over a very short timetable (and in the middle of the summer). Cuts include maternity, emergency operations and critical care.

supportstaffordhospital.co.uk

Trafford General

Campaigners at Trafford General Hospital are government fighting plans to downgrade their A&E to an urgent care centre and then in five years time to a minor illness and injury centre.

The change would also see critical care, emergency surgery and children's services being cut. These plans have nothing to do with improving services, centralising specialist services or any other often heard "reason" for A&E closure. Central Manchester NHS Trust says it needs to cut £19m a year from the budget.

The are considering whether to apply for a Judicial Review of the Health Secretary's decision to close these services. Let's hope they have been encouraged by Lewisham.

savetraffordgeneral.com

Barts

Barts Health, which runs six London hospitals plans to make £77.5 million of savings, including almost £30 million in emergency care and surgery.

Problems have been exacerbated by the shape of the "Reformed NHS" in particular failure of NHS England and clinical commissioning groups failing to pay their bills on time.

What is likely to be cut? Services to some of the most vulnerable people. Mental health, care of people with learning disabilities.

Whittington

Campaigners defending Whittington Hospital have achieved their aim of stopping the sell-off of buildings, ward closures and job cuts.

But the hospital board has now opted to save money by pushing through a faster turnover of patients — and early discharge.

Campaigners are concerned that the early discharge proposal is heavily reliant on social care by local councils. But the hospital serves a community that includes a lot of vulnerable people — an increasingly elderly population, many lone parents, a high number of people with mental health issues and high poverty rates.

There are simply not enough staff to support these people.

dwhc.org.uk