



Lewisham

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# Hospital Worker

A Workers' Liberty healthworkers' bulletin

www.workersliberty.org • hospitalworkerbulletin@gmail.com • 0207 394 8923

## Winter Crisis Looms

Norovirus hasn't hit us yet. But the warning pictures telling vomiting people to stay away are all in place. The 'winter pressures' have begun. People are getting 'bugs', colleagues are going off sick or having to stay at home with sick children. And all our patients suddenly seem sicker. Coughs, colds and stomach bugs, combined with a fear of turning on the heating are already having an impact. The winter ward is open, and we're all bracing ourselves for worse to come.

NHS England is giving us crumbs to address the yearly crisis we face. Last year the weather was particularly bad, and the norovirus went on month after month. The weather didn't really break until April. Tragically this combined with the government's determination to cut back on funding and beds, and led to ambulance queues outside A&Es, trolley queues around corridors inside the hospitals.

Cliff Mann of the College of Emergency

Doctors believes "this winter will probably be worse than last winter, which was the worst we have ever had, a tipping point for the NHS's delivery of acute care."

It is completely implausible that the months of crisis we experienced last year did not lead to avoidable deaths. It is difficult to be sure about the exact cause of death in acutely ill patients with multiple comorbidities. But the more vulnerable they are, the more important good quality timely healthcare is. Staff at QEH told LHW that a patient recently died in a corridor in QEH when he should have been in ITU

for want of beds. These things are hard to prove, and for the workers involved in witnessing these horrific events, they must be traumatic.

It's a difficult line to tread between exposing that which management would dearly love to cover up, and adding to the mud that the right wing press hurl continually at the NHS. The press want to discredit the NHS to make it easier for private companies to come in and take over. We need to be clear that the NHS crisis has been manufactured in the corridors of power. It is part of a longstanding Tory plan to privatise the NHS so that the government's millionaire chums can profit from our ill health.

Hunt and his supporters in the right-wing press want to portray the funding squeeze, like the cold weather, as a force of nature, beyond human control. This is a lie. There is plenty of money to go around. But it is being robbed from the NHS to fill the profit margins of the private health firms, banks, hedge funds and PFI vultures. We will work ourselves ragged this winter and still people will die because of this political decision.

## Government Insults Nurses (again)

Last week, the government proposed a new law whereby doctors and nurses could face jail time if found guilty of "wilful neglect". This forms part of their response to the widespread abuses at Mid-Staffordshire. This law is an insult to healthworkers and will not address any of the underlying problems that caused the Mid-Staffs scandal.

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

# Government Insults

## Nurses *(again)* continued...

It is worth recounting what happened at Mid-Staffordshire. Between 2005-8 between 400-1200 patients died needlessly due to substandard levels of care. Patients were left for hours in their own faeces and were so thirsty they were drinking out of flower vases. At the same time, NHS bosses, right up to the Health Secretary, thought that Mid-Staffs was one of the best hospital trusts in the country and in February 2008 awarded it Foundation Trust status.

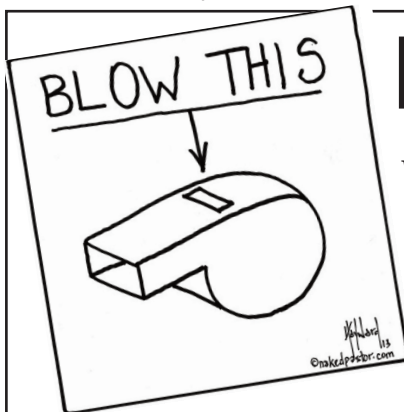
### Winter Crisis Looms...

"Fair is foul and foul is fair" in Hunt's new NHS  
In his blog Tim Higginson compared patients to the "ghost of Banquo". We think this is very apt. Any managers who don't speak up about the cuts are complicit in Hunt's plans to destroy the NHS and endanger life. Anyone who acts in this way should be haunted by the ghosts of those who could have survived, those sick and injured that we had the technology to heal. We need to alert the public to the all the tragedies playing out in our hospitals. Every time Jeremy Hunt announces a new initiative that undermines the NHS, our bosses like the witches coven should raise the alarm: "Something wicked this way comes".

The Francis Report found that there was a widespread culture of bullying. Nurses who raised concerns were slapped down. The main union, the RCN, was led by senior management, and its "partnership approach" meant it sided with management against any dissident workers. The culture was exacerbated as they cut staffing levels and people feared for their jobs. Management policed the workforce with constant demands for data and nurses spent much of their time filling in clinically irrelevant paperwork. The data looked marvellous – but it did not reflect the nightmarish reality.

The new law is part of the government's propaganda offensive against public sector workers, which it portrays as irresponsible, lazy, overpaid and clueless. They do not believe that we will do our job properly without constant surveillance, micromanaged direction and draconian punishments when things go wrong.

Their approach leads to people covering up mistakes. It means that organisations never learn from those mistakes and nothing ever improves. The real solution to the systemic problems at Mid-Staffs are safe staffing levels and the development of a culture of openness. But the government isn't interested on patient safety – it is only interested in using the Mid-Staffs tragedy to bash the NHS and the people who work in it.



## Blow the whistle!

We have won our victory at Lewisham, we have saved our hospital. But the NHS continues to crumble around us. It won't be long before the national destruction catches up with our little hospital. So what can we do? We have to be true to our own, and our colleagues standards of the care that we should deliver. We have to be true to the faith and trust our vulnerable patients put in us. If we are to look

ourselves in the mirror, avoid burn out, and self loathing, we need to raise the alarm whenever we see a lack of resources harming or even killing our patients. We need to grab whatever we can to make sure that everyone knows, take the largest shrillest whistle you've ever seen, and blow it til it screams out a message that no-one can ignore - this government is killing the NHS, and in doing so it is killing its most vulnerable citizens!

Whistle blowing is a courageous act, fraught with danger, because it exposes truths that management wish to hide. Unions can help. But as a place to start, you can e-mail us anonymously at the e-mail address at the top of this bulletin, you can use this bulletin as a forum to communicate your concerns to your colleagues across the hospital. We will never publish names, or any other information that can identify you without your permission.