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UNISON

Eastern Region

Sorry - can't afford nurses any more: we are commercial directors



A health worker's guide to 'World Class Commissioning'

An explanation of the whole complex of policies flowing from what has become known as "World Class Commissioning" could be a very long and complicated document.

So UNISON Eastern Region has decided to make it simpler, lighter, and easier to read, by dividing the whole issue into bite-sized chunks, rather like ministers have been dividing up the NHS and offering tasty morsels to the private sector.

We think it would be a mistake to take some of these ideas and ridiculous jargon terms too seriously, since few of them reflect any serious thought or content, none of them is based on any evidence – and most are used by senior NHS managers in the way a drunk uses a lamp-post: more for support than illumination.

So we will take some of the bizarre language of World Class Commissioning, explain its real meaning, and show how it fits together into a drive for privatisation and fragmentation of the NHS – policies UNISON has consistently opposed.

More detail on any of these issues can be found in UNISON Eastern Region's special newspaper *Eastern Eye* and from other sources.

"World Class Commissioning"

The new name for the discredited policy of "Commissioning a Patient-Led NHS" that was unveiled back in 2005 by then NHS chief executive Sir Nigel Crisp (later known as Lord Cheesy Wotsit).

The policy then meant splitting up Primary Care Trusts, and hiving off their directly-provided services. It was met by a storm of protest and was so unpopular that it lost Crisp his job, and key proposals were delayed by ministers. Now the same

proposals are being pushed through as "World Class Commissioning".

They do not tell us which part of the world they are copying, but "Commissioning" is the key word, meaning the separation of purchaser from provider – splitting the NHS into a "market".

"Competencies"

"Competence" may seem a strange word to associate with many Primary Care Trust bosses, but in this context a "competency" effectively means one of the standards by which PCTs are assessed by Strategic Health Authorities.

There are eleven "competencies" in World Class Commissioning, most of them largely harmless (even though worded in the most confusing and jargon-ridden language). But the most damaging one is Number 7 – "stimulate a local market" in health care.

"Stimulate a local market"

This has nothing to do with subsidising stall-holders: the requirement is to ensure that private sector providers, whether for-profit or allegedly non-profit, are encouraged to bid

for contracts to run services previously delivered directly by the PCT.

"Any willing provider"

In order to maximise the possible competition for local contracts, PCTs are required to draw up a list of services that will be opened up to literally any company or organisation prepared to do the job – "any willing provider" – and compile a list of private sector and other providers which claim to be willing to deliver services at the NHS tariff, and which pass a few minimal criteria for quality.

Step forward Delbooy and Rodney.

Obviously the views of patients and of NHS staff are ignored in this process.

"Transforming Community Services"

This is the general process of driving through these changes in PCTs in England. Few people know that an extensive 120-page document setting out a process for privatisation of PCT services was published in January on the Department of Health website.

Ministers have made no attempt to publicise it or discuss the policy with health workers or the wider public.

It is worth noting that in Scotland, where the NHS market has been scrapped and services reintegrated, and

in Wales, where the same process is under way, these policies do not apply.

There, devolved governments, listening to the concerns of their electorate, have stuck much more closely to the traditional principles and values of the NHS. We, on the other hand, have government from Westminster ...

