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PRESS RELEASE

NEW HEALTH WHITE PAPER IS ‘A CURATE’S EGG’, SAYS AMICUS

Health Secretary urged ‘not to wash her hands’ over future of PCTs

The new health and social care White Paper is ‘a curate’s egg’, Amicus, the health union with a 100,000 members working in the health sector, said today (Monday, 30 January).

Amicus believes that the government’s commitment to frontline services outlined in *Care outside Hospitals*, launched today, will be severely undermined by the financial crisis facing primary care trusts (PCTs) and the continuing question marks over PCTs providing services after 2008.

Gail Cartmail, the Amicus Head of Health, said: ‘We completely support the government’s priorities in tackling health inequalities and boosting the sexual health services. Health visitors, school nurses, speech and language therapists, and sexual health advisors are central to implementing the government’s public health policies.’

‘We are very keen to move forward, but our members in the frontline are being distracted – and their morale is being decimated - by the debate over future organisational structures.’

‘Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt can’t wash her hands of this. She has said that the 2008 deadline for PCTs to relinquish the majority of their provider role is no longer part of the reform package. If that is this case, why doesn’t NHS Chief Executive, Sir Nigel Crisp formally rescind his letter of July 2005 that stated PCTs would lose their provider functions?’

Ms Cartmail said; ‘The government must not ignore the financial pressures facing PCTs which have already led to job cuts in primary care, as well as posts being frozen. Unless this is resolved very quickly, the whole fabric of the White Paper will be eroded by this financial morass.’

Ms Cartmail said that ‘social enterprise’ companies being formed outside the PCT structure were ‘deeply unsatisfactory’. She pinpointed the case of Central Surrey Health, a co-ownership company, which was created precisely because of job cuts in the local PCT.

‘The so-called concept of ‘social enterprise’ is the first big step towards privatisation of NHS primary care services. It will lead to fragmented services, and the prospect of poorer pay and conditions for staff, with the adverse knock-on effects for patients and clients.’

‘The vast majority of the electorate supports a unified NHS. They don’t support the privatisation of the NHS which will turn into a Californian gold rush for private companies, at the taxpayer’s expense.’

Ms Cartmail said that if the government adopted the recommendations from organisations representing health professionals; the White Paper would be ‘much less of a curate’s egg.’

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