

December 2, 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

As a physician in the United States with 25 years of private practice experience, I would like to offer my comments on the proposed changes to the NHS. During my medical career, I have watched medicine in the U.S. move from a caring profession to a profit-driven business. Although I believe in the value of competition in the world of business, I have come to believe that it is to the detriment of the patient when applied to the medical model.

In my first years of private practice, health insurance provided my patients with protection from financial disaster coverage and spread the risk of medical catastrophes. In these years, 92% of the healthcare dollar went to direct patient services. As managed care and competitive business practices were integrated into medicine, the rules changed for doctors and health insurance companies alike. Maximizing profit and efficiency has meant fewer dollars for direct patient services and more for administrators and investors. It is now not unusual that less than 70% of the healthcare dollar goes to direct patient services.

Simultaneously with these business changes, more and more Americans have no health insurance coverage. They avoid medical visits until problems are severe and then suffer financial ruin when a family member becomes ill. Physicians are paid less and less for each service under competitive contracts. They must spend less time with each patient and cannot afford to provide charity care as they did in the past. Both physicians and patients are more dissatisfied today than at any time in my medical career. The huge amount of money going to administrators and investors today could solve many of the problems in the current U.S. healthcare crisis.

There is no perfect healthcare system. The British NHS has a long reputation of fairness and maximal benefit with limited healthcare funds. I urge you not to degrade this system by moving to more privatization and competition. This type of movement has been a disaster to healthcare in the U.S.

Sincerely,

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