



## **Why YOU should oppose the privatisation of Harthill GP surgery**

### **What has happened?**

Lanarkshire Health Board has put the Harthill GP surgery out to tender, i.e. up for auction. GPs will find themselves up against giant corporations bidding to run the service. The whole process is based on a commercial model inappropriate for our NHS and is a move towards privatisation.

### **Why has Lanarkshire Health Board taken this route?**

Going out to tender is part of the privatisation process that is already well advanced in England and is spreading to Scotland. In England many GP surgeries are passing into the hands of private companies, including huge American corporations like UnitedHealth Europe. Communities south of the border are mobilising. One group of villagers went to the High Court to challenge the handover of their surgery, and won. Despite all the chaos in the English NHS, with cuts, protests and job losses, Lanarkshire Health board has decided to follow the English down the road to privatisation.

### **Does the health board need to put the practice out to tender?**

No. They could simply contract with GPs in the traditional manner or even employ GPs themselves. Instead they are likely to use a new contract model, called the Alternative Provider of Medical Services contract, or APMS, which allows the private sector to take over GP services. Under the contract, there are few controls over the quality and amount of care provided. Monitoring "is expected to be light touch". Information that is currently publicly available will become "commercially confidential".

### **Why would big corporations be interested in out-of-the way Harthill?**

Every year billions of pounds are spent on the NHS. Primary care (meaning GPs and other non-hospital services) represent a lucrative market that private sector companies want to break into. This is happening in hospitals with the increasing use of PFI. Not content with downgrading Monklands hospital to pay the £41 million PFI bill, the Health Board is now proposing to sell off GP services.

### **Why should it be a problem who runs the practice?**

Private companies have one interest – profits. They will look for ways to cut costs, increase revenue and expand their market share. Ultimately a doctor employed by a corporation is answerable to the bosses who are in turn accountable to shareholders. Research shows that the entry of for-profit providers into healthcare results in poorer quality care and less value for money. It brings with it all the costs of contracts and litigation, and the loss of the cooperation and the public sector ethos that is the great strength of the NHS. If successful, what is happening in Lanarkshire will be repeated across Scotland, changing the face of the health service – that is why it must be challenged.

### **Will patient care be affected?**

Companies will make profits by cutting down on care and staff costs. This could mean removing services from the NHS and then charging for them separately. The crucial doctor-patient relationship will suffer as the staff budget is cut. Already in England there is evidence of companies using fewer skilled and trained staff instead of doctors and nurses and these new companies cannot keep their GPs or staff meaning patients cannot build a trusting bond with their doctor.

### **What will this mean for staff?**

Commercial contractors do not have to adopt NHS terms and conditions, and do not offer employees NHS pensions, allowing them to undercut traditional GPs and slash their wage bill. It is essential they do so if they are to pay their shareholders.

### **What do we want?**

- The health board should withdraw its invitation to tender and ensure that primary care services are delivered either by salaried GPs or by bringing in GPs to run the practices.
- Lanarkshire has the fewest number of GPs per head of population in Scotland. It needs more GPs and more nurses not shareholders and profiteers.
- The tendering process is at an early stage and can still be stopped. Organise petitions, use the local press and ratchet-up political pressure.
- Demand the publication of all relevant information.
- Demand Lanarkshire Health board reverse the process.

**Say no to commercial contracts. Send Lanarkshire Health Board home to think again.**

### **KONP Contacts:**

**Alex Nunns (07763 607528) or  
Dr Chris Johnstone (christopher.johnstone@ntlworld.com)**

**[www.keepournhspublic.com](http://www.keepournhspublic.com)**