

PRESS RELEASE



News from Keep Our NHS Public campaign www.keepournhspublic.com

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Judicial review against UnitedHealth GP take over

The government's policy of encouraging private corporations to take over GP surgeries has been dealt a severe blow in the High Court. Late yesterday (16 March) Mr Justice Davis ordered a judicial review into the selection of UnitedHealth Europe - the British arm of America's biggest healthcare corporation - to run a practice in Derbyshire.

The decision is a huge setback for the government. The recent health white paper set out plans to open up primary care to the market, allowing private companies to run family doctors' surgeries as well as giving them control of commissioning budgets for patient care. But in one of the first cases where the policy has been tried it has met strong opposition.

Pam Smith, a local Labour parish councillor, started proceedings for a judicial review on the grounds of inadequate consultation after North Eastern Derbyshire Primary Care Trust announced that UnitedHealth Europe was its 'preferred bidder' for the Creswell Primary Care Centre. UHE's president is Simon Stevens, Tony Blair's former health policy adviser.

Patients and residents were angry that they had not been consulted by the PCT and that bids from local doctors had been overlooked. One such bidder - Dr Elizabeth Barrett, a GP with 20 years' experience in the area - had assembled a clinical team with the support of the parish council and the community, but was not even short-listed.

Freedom of Information requests revealed that UHE had scored highly on criteria such as proven track record of providing GP services and leadership by a clinician, despite having no experience and no clinical team in place.

The selection of UnitedHealth could be overruled, and the tendering process reopened, if the outcome of the judicial review goes in Pam Smith's favour. Ms Smith's lawyer hopes to have a trial by the end of May.

The Keep Our NHS Public campaign is urging the public to make more use of their legal rights. Many of the service changes, cuts and closures that are happening around the country can be challenged, especially if they are due to financial deficits.

Alex Nunns of Keep Our NHS Public said:

"The government can expect more of these challenges. There is a groundswell of opposition from communities around the country who are facing the effects of NHS reforms at the local level. With private companies increasingly taking over NHS provision and other services being cut amid huge deficits, people are using their legal rights to fight the consequences of the drive to turn the NHS into a market."

CONTACTS:

Alex Nunns – 07763 607 528

Richard Stein, Pam Smith's lawyer (Leigh Day & Co) – 0207 650 1243

Dr Elizabeth Barrett – 07779 082 037

Alex Nunns
Information Officer
Keep Our NHS Public
07763607528
konp.press@virgin.net
www.keepournhspublic.com