

Daily Telegraph 23rd

17th - December 2013

NHS consultants

SIR - The plea by your consultant surgeon correspondents (December 14) that team care is the only way to restore high-quality outcomes in the NHS is entirely laudable. However, the authors have mostly been in influential positions either in their Royal Colleges and even in the NHS's managerial structures. Did they speak out forcefully when the European working time directive, which in many cases halved the experience of new consultants, was introduced?

In Ireland and many Continental countries, the directive was taken with a pinch of salt and young surgeons got on with their training. Here, hospital medical directors allowed the rules to be slavishly adhered to.

What did the authors of the letter say when NHS trusts idiotically banned consultants from cross-referring their patients within hospitals, a process promoting speed and efficiency of diagnosis and treatment?

And what resistance did these senior surgeons mount when the NHS directed GPs to refer patients generically rather than to the clinician known to be the best locally for a given condition? In the absence of such resistance, it is hardly surprising that NHS administrators desperate to make savings have encouraged the consigning of patients to nameless responsibility.

Your correspondents berate the NHS for "taking away their teams and splitting up partnerships", but how much did they sit and watch from their Royal Colleges at the inception of the process? It is ironic that it has taken disastrous damage to a surgeon and countless episodes of death and injury to members of the public to highlight this, only one aspect of the decline in our national health care.

Peter Mahaffey FRCS
Cardington, Bedfordshire