

Scandalous largesse

Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary, has no shortage of problems to deal with. Despite a rising budget, it is clear that the resources of the NHS do not match the demands on it, a gap that will only widen in time. Without the sort of fundamental change to its funding model that few politicians are willing to discuss, much less implement, the best hope of narrowing that gap is to manage the NHS more efficiently. Indeed, such savings are essential to the service's survival.

The need for efficiency means it is, in turn, vital that the NHS has the best-possible managers, executives who can squeeze the maximum amount of high-quality care from every pound spent. This grim situation is the context for the case of Katrina Percy, erstwhile chief executive of Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust.

Ms Percy was bad at her job. Under her management, the trust failed to protect patients from harm, according to the Care Quality Commission. It failed to investigate hundreds of patient deaths, and there are questions about millions of pounds it paid to consultancy firms run by previous associates of Ms Percy, who admits her position had become "untenable". Yet she retains her £240,000 pay package and a job as an "adviser".

Such excess is sadly not unique. Reports of NHS managers enjoying absurdly generous deals are common: *The Telegraph* this month revealed soaring numbers of bureaucrats are being paid "off payroll", including a temporary manager receiving £60,000 a month. To Mr Hunt's heavy in-tray must be added the task of tackling a scandalous culture of impunity and largesse among health service executives.

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