

# Crisis in NHS is a conspiracy to push privatisation, doctors claim

**Kat Lay** Health Correspondent

Doctors have accused the government of “consciously” creating the crisis in NHS hospitals to pave the way for a private sector takeover.

Delegates at the British Medical Association’s annual representative meeting in Bournemouth voted overwhelmingly in favour of a motion that they were told amounted to a verdict of conspiracy rather than incompetence.

It prompted a row with the Department of Health, which said in an official statement that the motion had “no relationship with reality”.

Doctors agreed that “the crisis in NHS hospitals has been consciously created by the government, in order to accelerate its transformation plans for private sector takeover of healthcare in England”.

Proposing the motion, the incoming chairman of the union, Chaand Nagpaul, said that quality and safety in the

NHS were threatened by demands for efficiency savings. He said that with costs rising faster than the NHS budget, “something has to give and the reality is clear to doctors, patients, the public and indeed everyone except government”.

He added: “The general election was a wake-up call, rejecting the political pretence of trying to squeeze a quart into a pint. In the name of safety and quality, austerity and savage cuts have to stop. We are a rich nation, we are a civilised society, the public deserve a safe, civilised health service. We cannot and must not accept anything less.”

Dr Nagpaul said that legislation that forced health service commissioners to tender services or GPs to send their patients to private treatment centres, proved “this is deliberate and it does need to be challenged”.

Grant Ingrams, opposing, asked the meeting: “Do you really believe this and preceding governments would be capable of such clear thinking?”

He said: “The current parlous state of the NHS has not been due to political conspiracy but is political cock-ups.”

Dr Mark Porter, the outgoing chairman, said that while there was evidence of more use of private services within the NHS, albeit from a low base, “there is not the same evidence that this is a deliberate conspiracy”.

The conference later proposed that the NHS abandon its sustainability and transformation plans (STPs), proposals drawn up by 44 local areas which supporters say will make services more efficient and save money but which opponents say are a backdoor to privatisation. Speakers said that the acronym stood for “slash, trash and privatise” and “steps to privatisation”.

A BMA spokeswoman said: “The rise in the number of private providers has led to the fragmentation of care which makes the delivery of high-quality care more difficult.”

A Department of Health spokes-

woman said: “This motion sadly has no relationship with reality — while of course there are pressures on the front-line, the government is now spending more than any in history on the NHS, has left doctors themselves to decide on use of the private sector, and public satisfaction is now the highest it has been in all but three of the last 20 years.”

Separately, doctors expressed concern that patients were increasingly turning to crowdfunding to get appropriate wheelchairs.

Dr Hannah Barham-Brown, a 29-year-old junior doctor from London, had to fund her own chair after being diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome two years ago. She said that the standard NHS chair weighed about 20kg and she would have needed to be pushed everywhere. Her own £2,000 chair, towards which the NHS offered only a £140 voucher, allows her to work full-time and independently.

**Long trips for treatment, page 14**

Times 27.6.17