

Doctors attack plan to close children's unit

Chris Smyth Health Editor

Doctors from around the world have condemned plans to close the biggest NHS children's heart surgery unit, in a battle that highlights how the NHS struggles to make life-saving reforms.

Thousands of children would suffer if the Royal Brompton's congenital heart disease unit was closed and care for adults would also be put at risk, according to 216 specialists in cardiology and paediatrics.

NHS England said last year that the unit was one of three hospitals that must no longer operate on children or adults with inherited heart problems in an attempt to improve standards by centralising care.

The move dates back to the Bristol heart scandal in the 1990s and the principle of restricting complex care to a smaller number of specialist centres is widely supported. However, disputes about the evidence and which units should close have derailed such plans.

In a letter to *The Times*, doctors say that the Brompton's results are excellent and "it is difficult to identify where any patient benefit would accrue" by closing the unit.

NHS England said: "We all want to ensure that patient care is as good as it can possibly be."

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