

25 April 2020

# CORONAVIRUS UPDATE



## 3 important things you should know

**1** The Tory government was warned in 2016 that the UK was not prepared or stocked up for a pandemic. **They buried the report and did nothing.**

**2** The NHS was already at **breaking point**, after 10 years of deliberate underfunding.

At the start of the worst crisis in its history, the NHS had:

- 100,000 staff vacancies
- 17,000 fewer hospital beds than 10 years ago
- only 4,000 intensive care beds (Italy had 12,000), and
- growing debts, as hospitals struggled with Private Finance Initiative (PFI) payments for hospital buildings and private loans just to keep the lights on.

**3** Since 2014, the NHS in England has been reorganising into 42 regional areas. Our area, NE London, covers seven boroughs.

The plan has been for these areas to be outsourced under separate 10-year contracts from as early as 2021 – opening the possibility of private companies (including US ones) being involved in whole regions of the NHS for profit.



## #ClapForNHS #ClapForCarers

*but know it's not enough*

**Across NE London, we've been stopping on Thursday nights to clap and bang pots for the fantastic work being done by staff in the NHS and the social care sector in this crisis.**

Whether they are hospital ward cleaners or Trust chief executives, GPs and their staff or district nursing and mental health teams, or all those working in the care sector – they have taken our respect to a whole new level.

We're also in awe of the people still carrying out essential work, despite the risks – whether they're running our buses and tubes, filling our prescriptions, emptying our bins, stacking our supermarket shelves, or making our deliveries.

**We all know that clapping and the promise of medals are NOT enough. These people are putting their lives on the line for us and they deserve better.**

## The government is failing us

### Where's the strategy?

The government knew about the coronavirus in January, but failed to take it seriously enough.

In March, they went from talking up 'herd immunity' to lockdown – all within a chaotic two weeks.

Now, no-one is clear what the plan is or who is really in charge.

### Where's the testing?

The government is still failing to carry out the mass testing that experts worldwide recommend. This means:

- NHS staff in quarantine, who could be at work
- care homes struggling
- the public and people in frontline jobs at greater risk, and
- no safe way to exit the lockdown.

### Where's the PPE?

Low stockpiles and useless privatised supply chains mean frontline staff are still not getting the Personal Protective Equipment they need.

Trusts are running out of essentials like gowns, while the social care sector is getting almost no help to protect its workforce.

By 25 April, 129 UK healthcare workers had died. We need PPE to be sorted out **now**.

We are heartbroken to report that, by 25 April, these 10 local healthcare workers had died:

**Dr Abdul Mabud Chowdhury** (53) was a consultant urologist at Homerton University Hospital. He warned about the lack of PPE on facebook, as he lay dying.

**Dr Syed Zishan Haider** (79) was a GP in Dagenham.

**Thomas Harvey** (57) was a mental health nurse at Goodmayes Hospital.

**Amrik Bamotra** (63) was a radiology support worker at King George Hospital.

**Gordon Ballard** was a London Ambulance Service paramedic.

**Dr Mamoona Rana** was a trainee registrar in psychiatry.

**Dr Rajesh Kalraiya** (70) was a consultant paediatrician for NELFT NHS Foundation Trust.

**Michael Allieu** was a staff nurse at Homerton Hospital.

**Sophie Fagan** (78) was a health support worker at Homerton Hospital and a former nurse.

**Dr Yusuf Patel** was a GP at the Woodgrange Practice in Forest Gate.

*(Information from national and local press, including Nursing Notes UK.)*

# The frontline staff with everything to lose

Staff across NE London are putting their lives on the line, despite years of flatlining wages and huge debts for student nurses whose grants were replaced by loans.

Our NHS staff want action on Personal Protection Equipment – not promises and lies.

With official supplies arriving too little and too late, scrub hub groups in Tower Hamlets/Newham, Waltham Forest and Hackney are doing a fantastic job of sewing scrubs for the NHS. It's a great community effort, but things should **never** have come to this.

Committed healthcare workers should not be forced to choose between their own health and treating patients.

**It's utterly unforgivable.**



## The outsourced staff still being denied decent pay and conditions

At risk NHS workers (porters, cleaners, support staff) whose jobs have been outsourced to Serco (Barts Health), Sodexo/Interserve (BHRUT), and ISS (Homerton), are low paid, often get no sick pay and won't qualify for NHS death-in-service benefits should the worst happen.



Protests by staff at Homerton in February shamed ISS into a national roll-out of coronavirus sick pay. They still don't get the London Living Wage.

Sodexo and Interserve have finally agreed to pay workers at BHRUT the London Living Wage from 1 April.

**All these NHS workers need to be brought back in house.**

# The old and vulnerable: NOT disposable

**One of the biggest scandals of this crisis is the way the old and vulnerable have been abandoned by government.**

Across NE London, elderly and disabled people are being cared for in care homes and in the community by desperate relatives and low-paid, over-stretched, care workers.

In many cases, people are depending on volunteers to meet their food needs and collect prescriptions. The government has been pitiful.

Despite the fact that as many as half of all coronavirus deaths will occur in

care homes, care workers are being left to carry a dangerous and heavy burden, with no testing or PPE.

At a nursing home in Stepney, it was being reported that seven people had died by 8 April, with another 21 showing symptoms of the virus.

The deaths included Jamshad Ali, a retired tailor who came to Britain from Bangladesh in 1962 and who once worked for Burberry.

## The government is failing us

### Social care in meltdown

The UK's mostly privatised social care system – much now owned by private equity – was already on the verge of collapse. Yet, over the past two decades, despite 17 major reports, no government has acted. **It's time for a fully funded National Health and Social Care Service, free at the point of use.**

**Vulnerable people should never be treated as disposable. They too are people with lives, stories and loved ones.**

# Migrant NHS charges: a public health disaster

**Coronavirus treatment is free on the NHS for everyone. But fear of the Home Office has already cost the life of one desperate Filipino man in his 50s, who sought no help. This is devastating and desperately unsafe for us all.**

We've been campaigning against migrant charges in the NHS for nearly three years. They are dangerously unsafe for undocumented people, unfair to people on student and work visas (many of whom work in the NHS), and a major assault on our NHS as a free service for all who live here.

Led by fellow campaigners MedAct and others, more than 60 cross-party MPs, backed by seven major health organisations and 100+ community groups, petitioned the government to end the hostile environment in the NHS during the pandemic. The government refused.

**We want an end to all charging.** It's a serious local issue. Newham Save our NHS found that in 2018-19, a staggering 739 pregnant women were billed for maternity care by Barts Health hospitals – even though 290 were actually eligible for free care.



### Thank you from NE London

We wish to thank local MPs Apsana Begum (Poplar & Limehouse), Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green & Bow), John Cryer (Leyton & Wanstead), Stella Creasy (Walthamstow), Diane Abbott (Hackney North & Stoke Newington), Sam Tarry (Ilford South) and Jon Cruddas (Dagenham & Rainham) for signing the MedAct petition. Also Stephen Timms (East Ham), who wrote to Barts Health CEO Alwen Williams on this issue and Lyn Brown (West Ham) for writing to Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

We also thank the faith and community groups who, together with Waltham Forest Save our NHS, wrote to Matt Hancock.

## The government is failing us

### Where's the data?

People from ethnic minorities, including NHS staff, are dying in disproportionate numbers. But Public Health England has only just started reporting on ethnicity. **We urgently need detailed research.**

Dr Kambiz Boomla, a former Tower Hamlets GP, now part of the primary care development team at Queen Mary, has been analysing coronavirus diagnosis rates from local GP data to look at the effect of ethnicity. He reports:

“South Asians get COVID in Tower Hamlets 1.9 times as often as whites, and black people 1.6 times as often as whites. This is likely to be due to many factors, including the work they do, overcrowding and diseases like diabetes occurring at a younger age.”

## The government is failing us

### Where are the ventilators?

Weeks into the crisis, and the government is still playing catch-up with ventilators.

Ordering late, ignoring an EU procurement scheme 'for political reasons', choosing inexperienced companies like Dyson to scale up production, and ordering thousands of the wrong type of ventilator, have all contributed to this failure.

### Why are we paying for private beds?

The government's deal to 'block book' almost the entire resources of the private health sector has added 8,000 more beds, 10,000 more nurses and 700 doctors to the NHS. The sector is now covering NHS cancer and other urgent work.

**But who really benefited?** With demand for private beds dropping, NHS elective work cancelled, and with huge rents and loans to pay, the private sector has been given a generous government grant.

BMI London Independent Hospital in Whitechapel is normally almost entirely full of NHS patients. Its owner, BMI Healthcare, merged with Circle Health on 21 March. This huge company is committed to expanding further, so that it can benefit from yet more outsourcing work from the NHS in future.

So, the government has made up for the beds it cut by bailing out private companies with a direct interest in replacing the NHS.

**These beds should have been requisitioned. They should not be paid for by us.**

## Intensive care beds

**The three NE London hospital trusts have been working round the clock to raise their intensive care capacity.**

Before the crisis, our trusts were already filled to beyond safe limits, with waiting lists soaring, thanks to a lack of beds and staff. To boost intensive care now, they have had to cancel yet more operations.

**Homerton Hospital** started with 10 ITU beds and is aiming for 50.

**Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust** (BHRUT) started with 44 critical care beds at Queen's and eight at King George and has been aiming to double its ventilator beds. Nearby, the original building for Goodmayes Hospital – which was due to be sold off to housing developers this year – is currently home to 100 step-down beds. **A good example of why NHS land should not be sold off.**



**Barts Health NHS Trust** started out with just 118 ventilator beds and is aiming to get to 200 beds at St Bartholomew's, 150 at The Royal London, 35 at Whipps Cross and 36 at Newham University Hospital.



Fitting out the top two floors at The Royal London will yield a further 160 beds. These floors have been empty since the new hospital opened in 2012, because the Trust's finances have been crippled by the PFI deal that paid for the rebuild. **These floors must now stay open for NHS patients.**

The planned rebuild of Whipps Cross includes fewer in-patient beds than currently – despite NE London's huge population growth and having one of England's busiest A&Es. Waltham Forest Save Our NHS are right: **these plans must be revised.**

### NHS Nightingale – not what was promised

The NHS Nightingale Hospital at the ExCel building in Newham was created in an impressive 10 days. The headlines talked of it providing intensive care for 3,600 patients.

It soon emerged that it wasn't taking the sickest patients and referring hospitals were expected to send staff and equipment too. The hospital covers the whole of the south east, not just London, so this could also tie up ambulances.

By 21 April, Nightingale had only treated 41 patients – 50 had been

turned away, mainly for lack of nurses. There is an appeal out to other hospitals to send 200 more nurses and doctors to the site.

A letter leaked to the *Health Service Journal* suggests the plan is now to aim for just 252 intensive care beds and 42 step-down beds. Yet, many more will be needed for the NHS to restart elective surgery in future.

The NHS has been desperately short of staff and beds for years. **We wish it hadn't taken a pandemic for this to be made so public.**

# Don't just clap... *take action*

- Join or donate to the national organisation **Keep our NHS Public** (KONP) to help the ongoing fight to save our NHS.
- Sign the KONP-backed petition, listing **six demands from doctors and nurses**.
- Sign the Doctors in Unite petition calling for **proper funding for the NHS**.
- Sign the 38 degrees petition calling on the government to **protect health workers**.

## NE London Save Our NHS (NELSON)

NELSON is an umbrella group for the five local campaign groups listed on this page. We campaign separately and together.



Our most recent focus has been on the campaign against migrant charges. We are also tracking the reorganisation of our local NHS in line with NHS England's 2019 Long term plan. The plan threatens the continuing existence of the NHS as a publicly provided service, free at the point of use.

## Join your local campaign to stay informed and get involved

### Barking, Havering, Redbridge

#### Save King George Hospital

Email [andy.walker@talk21.com](mailto:andy.walker@talk21.com)

The campaign scored an important victory recently, when BHRUT backed down from plans to close or downgrade A&E at King George.



### Tower Hamlets

#### Tower Hamlets Keep our NHS

**Public:** Email [thkeepournhspublic@gmail.com](mailto:thkeepournhspublic@gmail.com) and/or visit our facebook page.

Ongoing campaigns on local NHS-related issues.



### Hackney

#### Hackney & City Keep Our NHS

**Public:** Email [konph@hackneykeepournhspublic.org](mailto:konph@hackneykeepournhspublic.org) and/or visit our facebook page.

### Waltham Forest

#### Waltham Forest Save Our NHS

Email [wawfsaveournhs@gmail.com](mailto:wawfsaveournhs@gmail.com) and/or visit our facebook page.

Barts Health have been planning to re-build Whipps Cross Hospital for quite a while. But the plan includes fewer beds than we already have. Back WF Save Our NHS in their current campaign.



### Newham

#### Newham Save Our NHS

Email [newsonhs@gmail.com](mailto:newsonhs@gmail.com)

and/or visit our facebook page.

They say: Our NHS needs properly funded, Newham Council run care homes, with good pay and conditions for staff.



**If you're on the frontline:** Join a union or a professional association – especially if your work is low-paid and putting you at risk. You need protection and the assurance that you're not alone

**If you're a healthcare worker** sign the petition to tell the government: "We are not disposable – proper PPE now".