

Councillors' RoughGuide to Accountable Care Systems

Protect Comprehensive Healthcare For All!

Councillors, via their scrutiny role, have the power - and the duty to use that power - to protect the NHS and social care from significant changes that would damage the health interests of the public, and the NHS and social care services themselves.

PLEASE USE YOUR POWER! IT'S YOUR DUTY!

Refer Accountable Care Systems proposals to the Secretary of State!

From April 2018, several Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships propose to become a new form of local NHS and social care organisation called an Accountable Care System. (Recently rebranded by NHS England as an Integrated Care System to avoid the pesky American connotations of Accountable Care.) This is a new public/private business model for health and social care - like the USA's Medicare/Medicaid, which provides basic state-funded health insurance for people who are too poor or ill to get private health insurance.

Accountable Care sounds nice - but it would end comprehensive healthcare for all

The "care" is managed care: a one-size-fits-all treatment for a given disease or illness. Replacing patient-centred care with tick box routines, it allows less qualified, lower-skilled staff to treat patients.

Designed to slash around £25bn off NHS and social care spending by 2020/1 compared to current levels, Accountable Care Systems would be contracted to provide managed care to their area's population through annual fixed whole population payments, that would have to cover everything that comes through the door.

What happens if more comes through the door than this contract could cover?

Such contracts are explicitly intended to reduce "demand" and increase "efficiency". Experience in other countries has shown that Accountable Care Organisations/Systems, have cut demand and costs by cherry picking patients whose treatment is seen as the best value for money.

Like private health insurance - Accountable Care is planned and paid for on the basis of standardised financial considerations - not individual patients' clinical needs. Cost cutting is further incentivised by allowing the Accountable Care Organisation or System to retain any unspent money at the end of the annual contract.

A two tier health and social care system

The likely upshot is that Accountable Care Systems in England would also restrict access to treatments - driving those who can pay, to seek private health care.

Those of us who can't go private, would just make do with reduced access to healthcare - the NHS would become a UK version of the USA Medicare/Medicaid.

The ground is being prepared. The NHS England Board has stated that in 2018-19 not all patients will be able to access planned surgery within the constitutional waiting times.

Increased NHS and social care privatisation

The 2015 Comprehensive Spending Review that announced NHS sustainability and transformation funding made it clear that the government was committed to Accountable Care Organisations as means of long term partnerships with the private sector.

Both the government and its quango NHS England have explicitly linked the Sustainability and Transformation Plans (now proposed to become Accountable/Integrated Care Systems) to the requirement to “encourage” increased private sector involvement in the NHS.

Hospital cuts and the related increase of out of hospital care that are key to Accountable/Integrated Care Systems are geared to increase private company involvement in the NHS and seen as a massive market opportunity

Government under-funding of the NHS opens the door to private sector finance. Behind the derisory £325m STP funding in Hammond's 2017 Spring Budget (for a few “most advanced” STPs) was the plan for Local Economic Partnerships to source a large proportion of investment in Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships - soon to be Accountable Care Systems - from private companies by 2020. Another likely source of private finance is Social Impact Bonds.

Private companies could take a controlling position within the NHS.

As a result of the 2012 Health and Social Care Act, the private sector already has contracts for both Commissioning Support and providing NHS services.

The Accountable Care Models contract can clearly be awarded to private companies. This would mean goodbye to our National Health Service, as it would put NHS organisations in a subordinate position within complex contractual arrangements. The position of companies like Optum, with contracts for commissioning support AND community services, is already particularly invidious.

