



Patients Not Passports

Health for All Sat. 3rd Nov, 10am - 4pm St. Bede's Church Fern Grove / Hartington Road L8 0SQ **Patients Not Passports**

Rayah Feldman (*Maternity Action*), **Kitty Worthing** (*Docs Not Cops*), **James Skinner** (*Medact*), **Joe Rylands** (Jr Doctor), **John Grayson** (*SYMAAG*), **John Nicholson** (Immigration Barrister), **campaigners** from *These Walls Must Fall*, *Refugee Women Connect*, *Asylum Link Merseyside*

Speakers, Workshops, Lunch

Immigration health charges

Rayah Feldman's report for Maternity Action, *What Price Safe Motherhood?* analyses the impact of maternity bills imposed on "undocumented migrants".

"Natasha" overstayed her student visa and was deserted by her partner when she became pregnant. After her miscarriage, Natasha received an invoice for £4,900, a letter requesting payment within 7 days, and a letter from a Debt Collection Agency. As a result, she did not return for follow up care. She was afraid to go back for a check-up or to find out what had caused this miscarriage or a previous one.

"My baby was buried and I couldn't even go. I was just so scared they were going to come and detain me. I went to see my GP, I was still bleeding then. They had to take me to the theatre to do a D&C. I haven't had any examination to see if it is all OK. At times my period is so painful, I feel cramps when I sit down, when I get up I can hardly walk sometimes. A lot of clots... I am scared to go to the hospital because I don't know how I will be able to pay. Even just to hear what caused the death of my baby. I am just thinking 'was I stressed?', 'was I not eating well?', 'was it a time I slipped on the stairs?' Or was it a medical problem? I don't know."

The NHS must never delay or refuse maternity care. But women who do not qualify for free NHS care are charged up to £6,500 or more for maternity. If they are non-EEA nationals two months in debt to the NHS (over £500), the Home Office will be notified and their visa application can be affected.

A&E is free to all. However, patients in hospital can be charged for emergency care beyond the A&E department.

This thin end of the wedge attacks immigrants and threatens all of us. It undermines doctor-patient confidentiality, key to the NHS. It is a risk to public health, as people can be afraid to seek early treatment and may become more ill.

Medics oppose the charges

Healthworkers in London are opposing the charges, particularly at Barts Hospital. Dr Kitty Worthing and A&E Nurse James Skinner, will describe the campaigns by *Docs Not Cops* and *Medact*, and Dr Joe Rylands will join them to discuss ideas for campaigning here. Doctors and nurses face huge conflicts of interest when immigration status is used to deny the care they were trained to deliver on the basis of need, not ability to pay.

Over the last year, 60 women have faced charges totalling £121,000 from Liverpool Women's Hospital. The Royal Liverpool has charged £144,551 to 64 patients, 19 of whom were referred to a Debt Collection Agency. Charges are upfront except when care is urgent and immediately necessary.

The Women's, Royal, and Liverpool CCG have no info on the clinical impact of the health charges. Imagine if a new drug

were prescribed without knowing if it was safe or therapeutic, only how much it cost.

Who's next?

The charges won't solve the NHS crisis. They are less than 0.1% of the budget at the Women's and 0.03% for the Royal Liverpool, dwarfed by PFI and the systematic underfunding of the NHS. But a system to test patients for eligibility could be applied to anyone the government wishes to charge. A&E and primary care may be charged in future.

As Refugee Women Connect, These Walls Must Fall and *Asylum Link Merseyside* will describe, asylum seekers face many other barriers to healthcare including call costs, compulsory online self-service, difficulty in getting appointments and booking interpreters, telephone triage, language, and some staff attitudes.

Yarl's Wood, where women went on hunger strike in February, is an immigration detention centre holding deportees from the North West. The notorious G4S has the healthcare contract, and provides inadequate asylum housing elsewhere, as John Grayson will explain.

John Nicholson will describe health charges as part of a growing 'hostile environment' in Welfare since the 1970s.

NHS Bill

The NHS was founded as a universal, comprehensive service, free at the point of use, publicly funded, provided and accountable. The NHS Bill, to restore it, includes the repeal of Sections 38 and 39 of the 2014 Immigration Act, which impose the health charges. Come join the discussion, and let's see what we can do.

Organised by: *Keep Our NHS Public Merseyside, Save Liverpool Women's Hospital* campaign. Supported by: *Docs Not Cops, These Walls Must Fall, Refugee Women Connect, Asylum Link Merseyside, South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group*