

Press release on behalf of Keep Our NHS Public for IMMEDIATE use

NHS campaigners join with politicians, celebrities and the BMA to oppose the Health and Care Bill

On **Wednesday 8th of September (7-9pm)** NHS campaigners will play host to doctors union the BMA, NHS staff, celebrities and politicians from across political parties at an online meeting **[1]** called in opposition to the new Health and Care Bill, currently being voted on in parliament. Campaigning group Keep Our NHS Public **[2]** hope to both raise public and politicians awareness over the proposed legislation, and to increase the pressure on MPs and in the Lords to vote against it as the bill goes through it's next stages in late autumn and winter.

Campaigners and supporters who will speak at the meeting include Dr David Wrigley deputy council chair of the BMA, shadow health secretary Jonathon Ashworth, Dr Philippa Whitford MP (SNP) actress Julie Hesmondhalgh, and writer Michael Rosen. Campaigners believe the bill will see less public accountability over healthcare decisions and increased powers given to private providers, as well as a worsening of the post-code lottery of care and cost-capping or cutting of certain services. The proposed Health and Care Bill fails to make it a duty for new NHS boards to provide emergency services and permits dangerous discharge from hospital without an assessment and care plan in place.

The NHS is already subject to the effects of a decade of austerity measures and a worldwide pandemic, it is severely understaffed and some workers are now discussing industrial action over untenable working conditions and low pay. This bill fails to address the pertinent issue of waiting lists and staffing and, despite its title, makes no provision for social care. Campaigners and others believe that this proposed legislation places patient data at risk of abuse and that it would confirm NHS Digital's power to share patients' data with third parties, including a wide range of private companies, raising concerns for patients' privacy.

Dr John Puntis, co-chair of Keep Our NHS Public, said:

"If passed, the bill will disrupt the NHS while it is struggling with huge pressures from Covid, staff shortages, and work backlog. The workforce crisis and the massive problem of social care are not tackled and it brings no extra funds to help trusts reopen closed beds. Not one more nurse will be recruited or one extra patient treated, and neither does it bring any genuine integration of the NHS and social care. It will, however, divert time and effort away from patients to another top-down reorganisation while making the service even less accountable to local communities. Opportunity is created for the private sector to step into positions of influence. The bill is not about reversing privatisation and will not stop contracting out; there is no bar on private companies taking seats on local health boards. Some may choose to believe that a government that has handed out billions to inept and incompetent suppliers and test and trace contractors headed by cronies and donors really wants to limit privatisation and integrate services; I am not one of them."

Dr David Wrigley, deputy council chair at the BMA, said:

"In its current form, the Health and Social Care Bill addresses none of the problems the NHS is facing – too few resources, too little funding, a crisis in social care, and a huge shortage of staff. We are also concerned about the wide-ranging, excessive powers the Bill would confer on the Health Secretary, and that it fails to protect the health service from further outsourcing and encroachment of large corporate companies. Fundamentally, this is the wrong bill at the wrong time. With the NHS still managing the pressures of the pandemic, this is a huge and costly distraction from what the NHS should be focusing on. This Bill needs a major rethink and without significant amendment, the BMA cannot support it."

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Spokespeople are available for interview (STA). Contact Samantha Wathen, Press Officer for Keep Our NHS Public press@keepournhspublic.com or Call/WhatsApp: 0777 6047472

Notes to editors

1. Register today in advance for this webinar here:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84449998363>
2. Keep Our NHS Public is a national independent organisation campaigning for a well-funded, publicly owned and provided NHS www.KeepOurNHSPublic.com
3. **Further details on the online meeting may be found here:** https://www.facebook.com/events/3008760249342626?context=%7B%22event_action_history%22%3A%7B%22surface%22%3A%22page%22%7D%7D
4. **Speakers**
include:
 - Julie Hesmondhalgh (Actor)
 - Michael Rosen (Writer)
 - Jonathan Ashworth MP (Shadow Secretary of State for Health)
 - Dr Philippa Whitford MP (SNP)
 - Dr David Wrigley (BMA)
 - Holly Turner (Nurse)
 - Dr Sonia Adesara (Keep Our NHS Public)
 - Dr John Lister (journalist and health policy academic)

