

The cancer at the core of the NHS

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Polly Toynbee [has written this morning](#):

For the first time the entire NHS has been put under competition law. The financial and clinical safety of NHS foundation trusts used to be the responsibility of the regulator, Monitor. Now its website proclaims: "The first of Monitor's three core functions is to promote competition." That means "enforcing competition law" and "removing anti-competitive behaviour". Few yet understand the nuclear nature of this. It compels every NHS activity to be privately tendered. If the NHS is the preferred provider, that can be challenged in the courts or referred to the Competition Commission. Red-in-tooth-and-claw commercial competition breaks all partnerships.

Euophobic Tory MPs take note: this makes NHS contracts subject to EU competition law. The NHS was exempt as an essentially state-run service, but GP consortiums will no longer be allowed to use a trusted local hospital without tendering first, for fear that a private company could take them to court. Some global companies will happily run loss-leader services for a while, driving NHS services to close, and no doubt raising their own prices later.

This may not be a slow and stealthy change, but an immediate and radical explosion.

She is write. This is the cancer at the core of the new NHS.

The fear of litigation means that commissioning consortia will have to put the private sector on their list of considered alternatives for all bids - however unsuitable they are and however unable to provide the service they might be.

This is the end of three things. The first is of any concept of this being a national institution. It will be a private service. Second, it is the end of the service: a service is an integrated supply with as few boundaries as possible so that the patient is the centre of attention. This will not be the case now. I hear already of doctors not talking to doctors and the breakdown of trust between GPs and hospitals and yet that is core to the whole ethos of our health service - and the reason why it is so much cheaper than health care elsewhere. Third, this is the end of the focus on health. Now the focus will

be on profit.

This is the cancer at the core of the NHS.

And it will change all our lives, and very much for the worse.

You have reason to be worried.

And so should the ConDems be worried - this will be their nemesis.