Stephen Hawking on the NHS

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Roger Gartland, who is a reader of this blog, shared with me yesterday the notes he made from a speech made by Professor Stephen Hawking at the Toyal Societry of Medicine in August 2017, when I also happened to be present as a speaker.

Hawking said at that meeting:

There are two ways to think about a national health care system.

One is that the most humane and civilised system is one in which all people are provided for equally, based only on their needs, no matter who they are, rich or poor, young or old. I believe this, and have made public statements, that we must prevent the establishment of a two tier system with the best medicine for the wealthy and an inferior service for the rest.

The other way to think is a health care system needs to be organised in the most efficient way, so that there is as little waste of labour and resources as possible.

International comparisons indicate that the most efficient way to provide good health care is for services to be publicly funded and publicly run. The more profit is extracted from the system the more private monopolies grow, and the more expensive health care becomes.

For that reason, I have also made public statements that the NHS must be preserved from commercial interests and protected from those who want to privatise it. So, these two things coincide. The most humane system is the most efficient system.

This means that when politicians and private health care industry lobbyists claim that, "we cannot afford the NHS", this is the exact inversion of the truth. We cannot afford not to have the NHS.

A publicly provided, publicly run system is the most efficient, and therefore the most cost-effective way to provide good health care for all.

He was right then. His message remains true today. His wisdom prevails. But not in Westminster, it seems.