



Lewisham

Issue 14 (28 March 2013)

Hospital Worker

A Workers' Liberty healthworkers' bulletin

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No to government's racist scapegoating of immigrants!



Jeremy Hunt: posh boy with racist policies

This week, Jeremy Hunt said that immigrants were “clogging up” NHS hospitals. When challenged, Hunt had no figures to back up his claim. The government is resorting to racist scaremongering.

According to the government's own figures, “health tourists” cost the NHS just £7 million a year (0.007% of the NHS operating budget). In contrast, the government is cutting £20 billion (20% of the NHS operating budget) and implementing the biggest top-down reorganisation in NHS history costing a further £1.6 billion. The new system will create an unwieldy bureaucracy that will suck between 20-30% of the NHS budget away from front-line care.

One Lewisham nurse spoke to us about her experiences of caring and working with immigrants.

“David Cameron claims there is a ‘red carpet’ rolled out to immigrant patients and that the NHS is a ‘soft touch’. But it’s never been easy for immigrants to get treatment. Many years ago I met a young immigrant woman who had been diagnosed with a life-threatening, but potentially curable, disease. At the time of diagnosis she was on a student visa. The treatment was expensive, so they patched her up and sent her on her way, without giving the curative treatment. Her family couldn’t afford to pay, and treatment was not available in her own country. After a long legal battle she got leave to remain and the right to comprehensive NHS care. By that time her disease had progressed.

Chances of cure were now remote and the side effects severe, but the doctors felt guilty and afraid of the lawyers so they treated her anyway. It was a tortuous death. After some months and much hand wringing and tears they finally decided to turn the ventilator off. She was a medical student in her twenties, dying needlessly because she happened to be born elsewhere.

“Another common tale is the single mother from another country dying young. I cared for a young mother who had lived many years in this country, paid taxes and had legal status. When she was diagnosed the choice was treatment in the UK, or no treatment and limited care at home. After some time it became obvious she couldn’t look after the children any more. She wants them to grow up here, they don’t know anyone at home now. But though she has status there’s not a chance in hell of getting anyone else over to help.

SUPPORTING

We write our medical supporting letters, and put her in touch with immigration charities — it’s all useless.

At death’s door, with the children about to be taken into care, she spends the last of her money taking herself and her children back home. She takes them out of school to a country that’s foreign to them where they can watch their mother die with strangers.”

“I’ve never noticed it being easy for immigrants to access the NHS. Scapegoating immigrants is an old government trick to split the working class and divert attention away for the government’s own vandalism. It is true that the NHS can’t treat all the world’s sick. But the answer isn’t to rundown the NHS so it is as bad as other countries health-care systems – which is what the government want to do. The NHS is an international inspiration, it shows the world what is possible, at it’s best it has been a model of how health care can be provided to everyone and funded through general taxation.

“We need to support those working-class forces around the world that are fighting for their own version of the NHS against the big multinational healthcare firms that are pushing privatisation.”

LHW provides a forum for staff at the hospital to tell their stories and air their views. If you have a story to tell or an opinion to share then get in touch. The bulletin is edited by healthcare professionals and we will ensure confidentiality is upheld.



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Nurse Karl

With his finger on the pulse of industrial unrest, our bearded band 5 answers your questions...

Dear Nurse Karl,

I'm not a racist but all these immigrants are putting a massive strain on our resources. I'm from an immigrant background myself; we've been here for forty years and worked hard. But enough is enough. I see all these Africans coming over here, taking the benefits and the houses. I'm glad the government is cracking down on it.

Regards, Yan

Hi Yan,

Much tabloid scaremongering about immigration is based on myths. The real levels are much lower, and asylum seekers have to claim the meagre state benefits they're entitled because they are prevented from working.

People don't emigrate for fun. Immigration is often the result of global historical injustices and the ongoing exploitation of new markets in the global South by multinational firms. Is it fair that, while the wealth and commodities workers create can move around the globe unhindered, the workers themselves must jump through all kinds of hoops and, if we don't, we are treated as criminals — arrested, abused, and subject to forced deportation?

It's absurd that a person can be "illegal" because attempted to move to a different place than the one they were born in. What system of justice would make it a crime to move around? Immigration controls exist to divide the working class — legal and illegal, indigenous and foreign. Immigration raids are often used to smash attempts by migrant workers to organise against super-exploitation.

We need to raise the banner high: Workers of the world, unite!

Solidarity, Nurse Karl

Migrant workers: the reality

By a Lewisham nurse

For at least the past 10 years we've had a shortage of nurses and midwives. The problem is always filling vacancies not finding work.

The NHS has relied heavily on migrant workers, as nurses and in many other roles.

Many of my colleagues work as much as they can, families have saved up for their training, and they feel they must send as much of their wages home as they can manage.

One colleague had saved up to go home. When she returned her normal stoicism was gone, she couldn't hide her sadness. She'd not told us she'd hoped to bring her daughter back with her. She had planned and sought advice and she still wasn't sure what had gone wrong, but she had to leave her daughter at the airport.

When she'd first come to this country leaving her daughter with family had been the only option. But she thought one day they'd be reunited.

She'd considered not returning here, but her family were relying on her.

Meet the PFI parasites

This week: David Metter

David Metter is the tax-dodging director of PFI parasites, Innisfree.

Innisfree own a significant chunk of the South London Healthcare Trust PFI debt as well as another 27 hospitals, 269 schools, the Whitehall HQ of the Ministry of Defence, a Scottish motorway and a Welsh jail.

Metter is based in Guernsey so pays virtually no tax on his £60 million-plus fortune. He has never done a useful days work to earn this money. Instead he found a good scam for bleeding money from the taxpayer.

The National Audit Office reckons that Innisfree is making a 71% profit on its investment in the Princess Royal.