

Pathology Services – Keep Them In The NHS!

Almost every hospital in the UK, that runs 24-hour services, includes a pathology laboratory service. You probably never see it but most times when you attend a clinic, visit your GP or have to stay in hospital your doctor makes use of a hospital's pathology service.

Pathology test results are used to assist with the diagnosis of what is wrong with you, to monitor how you are doing, or to check that your treatment is effective. Either way, some 70% of all clinical decisions made by your doctor rely upon one or more tests provided by pathology services.

Modern pathology laboratories include millions of pounds worth of the most advanced equipment performing, on an increasingly automated basis, thousands of tests each day. However, the heart of the best laboratories is their staff.



Pathology staff include:

- Support grades – who carry out intensive and taxing duties requiring concentration and attention. They are often low paid despite being responsible for ensuring the delivery of essential work.
- Biomedical Scientists – who are qualified to degree standard and beyond carrying out specialist and often unique procedures demanding a thorough understanding of their work and highly developed manual skills.
- Clinical Scientists – who are often qualified to doctorate level and work directly with medical staff to develop the service, provide essential advice and advanced clinical care.

Staff want to work for the NHS – Regardless of the staff group they all share a common trait – that they chose a career in the NHS, often at considerably lower pay than they could command in the private sector. In the face of rising workloads and increasing cost pressures they remain in the NHS and many have 20, 30 and even 40 years' service.

Threat of privatisation: These staff now face the prospect of pathology services being privatised (for example by the private organisation 'Serco'). UNITE and its fellow pathology trade unions oppose this.

The true worth and value of the NHS Pathology service is its staff. They take years, even decades, to train and require constant development and training to keep pace with scientific change. The private sector has made frequent attempts to run NHS Pathology services before and has failed, due to its inability to retain and attract staff.

Diagnostic services require constant reinvestment to match the pace of clinical needs. To siphon off any portion of this for profit-making purposes will inevitably affect the quality of patient care.

The Pathology service is an international service and a scientific service. It relies upon information shared openly and constructively allowing review by other peers and an intellectual openness. This stands at odds with the secrecy and protectionism practiced by the private sector, whose involvement could drastically curtail much of the hospital based research in leading medical schools.

What are the risks?

- Staff shortages, underinvestment and damage to clinical research mean that any short term financial gains will result in long term detrimental costs to the patients and NHS pathology staff.
- The government must protect pathology services as frontline services.
- Not to do so will place at risk the treatment of the many patients who depend upon the expertise and commitment of NHS Pathology staff – **people like you and your family!**



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