

Laurels Action Group

Press Statement, 25.11.2008

Photos available of the lobby/presentation:

- 2168 - some of the patients' lobby outside PCT HQ at St Ann's Hospital
- Laurel protest at PCT Laurels surgery patient Dave Morris continues with the patients' presentation to the PCT Board in defiance of the efforts of the Board Chair to have lobbyists removed

50 patients occupy PCT Board meeting to ensure public concerns are heard about highly controversial health service privatisation plans

- PCT Chair abandons Boardroom, reconvenes meeting elsewhere, then tries but fails to suppress the patients' presentation. Patients condemn 'unwanted, unacceptable and unlawful' privatisation of the GP surgery at The Laurels Healthy Living Centre
- PCT Board try to ignore the presentation and instead push ahead with their controversial and damaging mass privatisation strategy threatening any new or changing health services and facilities

On Wednesday 26th November at 3pm 50 patients, mainly from the South Tottenham area and mainly users of The Laurels Healthy Living Centre, lobbied the Haringey Primary Care Trust Board meeting at St Ann's Hospital, South Tottenham. Placards included: 'We want caring Doctors, not greedy companies'. 'NHS for need, not for profits'. The lobby was called by the Laurels Action Group, a new group launched at the beginning of the month. As well as patients present there were members of local residents associations, older people's organisations and health campaign groups. The lobby was about the growing controversy over the threat of privatisation of The Laurels 'PMS' GP practice. The practice is based in the Laurels Healthy Living Centre, South Tottenham, which is also earmarked by Haringey's health managers for one of their proposed Polyclinics, which could then also face privatisation.

The patients were shocked when the PCT Chair, Richard Sumray refused the customary presentation opportunity to address the Board, saying that the meeting's Agenda was 'too long'. Those present therefore had to occupy the Boardroom in order to make their voices heard. Dave Morris, a patient at the practice under threat, distributed written copies of the presentation to all Board members and proceeded to go through the points. He was repeatedly told by the Chair to 'shut up' but stated that he had an obligation to inform the Board of the serious concerns about the tendering process, the lack of consultation with Laurels users, and the 'improper and unlawful' plan to develop a Polyclinic in a public building built in 2003 with strict legal restrictions on its usage.

A similar presentation had been successfully made by the LAG to the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Cttee on 13th November and as a result the PCT had been forced to admit to Councillors on the Committee that the consultation 'had been botched'. The PCT had reluctantly conceded it must re-run the consultation, and letters were sent out to patients this week for some meetings in December. However, as Mr Morris demonstrated to the Board, the letters were 'worse than useless' as they failed to even mention let alone consult over the key issue of the sale of the 'PMS' GP practice there!

Meanwhile, the PCT Chair continued to refuse to listen and instructed the Board to abandon the Boardroom. The whole Board later reconvened in a small room up a flight of stairs in another part of the hospital. The patients and supporters followed, entered that room and continued the presentation. The Board continued to ignore them, and tried to go through their Agenda points at the same time! Eventually the PCT Chair threatened to remove the patients by force and called the police. The patients and campaigners then left, Mr Morris giving out his phone number to all the Board members, and urging that any of them 'who cares about what is happening at The Laurels is welcome to phone me to discuss patients' concerns about the situation'.

The presentation in more detail:

Dave Morris, despite constant objections and interruptions from the Chair, explained to the Board that their plans are highly controversial and totally unacceptable because:

- Privatisation is an insult to the public service ethos of the NHS and 'those in charge of our healthcare should be committed to patients' welfare rather than to their shareholders' profits'
- There has been a scandalous lack of consultation with patients and users of the Centre who had been 'kept in the dark whilst the PCT developed the plans behind the scenes'

- The Laurels is a special community-based healthy living centre bought and set up in 2004 by public regeneration funding for the people of South Tottenham as a centre for a range of community-based healthy living projects. Most of the community projects have been unlawfully squeezed out. It was never intended for it to be taken over by the PCT for one of their controversial Polyclinics. Such Polyclinics, if set up, are also in danger of being sold off to multinational corporations by the PCT.
- The Council, as leaseholder of The Laurels, will be implicated. They only hold the lease on trust for the people of South Tottenham and should immediately investigate the legal status of the Centre and any plans which would transgress its aims.

For anyone doubting the scale of the threat to local NHS services he referred to the PCT report 'Communications & Stakeholder Engagement Strategy 2008-2011' prepared for Agenda Item 8c. The last para on p18 clearly sets out their plans to 'stimulate the market', via a 'contestability [ie privatisation] framework' and 'Commercial Strategy' for the provision of new services.

The Council's Overview & Scrutiny watchdog committee will reconvene next month on December 11th to 'review the situation'.

The Laurels Action Group has launched a public petition and a protest campaign, backed by leaflets, posters and street stalls. The Laurels patients efforts are supported by the Stop Haringey Health Cuts Coalition, Better Local Healthcare Campaign and the Save St Ann's Hospital Campaign Group

After the meeting, Simon Hester (Laurels PMS surgery patient), for the Laurels Action Group said: ' It is unacceptable that those running our NHS refuse to listen to patients' views. We call on all patients and healthworkers throughout the borough to speak out loud and clear, and to fight any attempts to privatise any of our public health services.'

The Laurels Action Group
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Patients' revolt forces Haringey Primary Care Trust to suspend privatisation threat to Tottenham GP Surgery

- PCT agrees to carry out consultation first
- PCT plans for Polyclinic may be 'improper' use of The Laurels Healthy Living Centre
- Council 'watchdog' committee to 'review the situation' next month
- Action group plan major lobby of the next PCT Board meeting on 26th November

On Thursday 13th November at the Civic Centre a special meeting of the Council's 'Overview & Scrutiny' sub-Committee (chaired by Cllr Gideon Bull) intervened in the growing controversy over the threat of privatisation of The Laurels 'PMS' GP practice. The practice is based in the Laurels Healthy Living Centre, South Tottenham, which is earmarked by Haringey's health managers for one of their proposed Polyclinics.

There was a powerful presentation [see below, and at end] to Haringey Councillors on the Committee, made on behalf of The Laurels Action Group by Simon Hester, a patient at the practice. As a result the Haringey Primary Care Trust, present at the hearing, had to agree to suspend their tendering process and carry out a full consultation with patients of the surgery. Patients are challenging the development of a Polyclinic at The Laurels due to the unusual legal status of the Centre, for which the Council are the leaseholders - the PCT's plans are considered to constitute an 'improper' use of this special community facility built with public regeneration funding.

Simon Hester, explained that the Laurels Action Group was a user group launched at the beginning of the month at an angry 50-strong public protest meeting. He told the Councillors they had a statutory duty to exercise their 'watchdog' powers over unacceptable proposals for the borough's health services. He said that these latest plans - in which the Haringey Primary Care Trust had scandalously already advertised the surgery for sale - are highly controversial and totally unacceptable because:

- privatisation is an insult to the public service ethos of the NHS and 'those in charge of our healthcare should be committed to patients' welfare rather than to their shareholders' profits'
- there has been a scandalous lack of consultation with patients and users of the Centre who had been kept in the dark whilst the PCT developed the plans behind the scenes
- The Laurels is a special community-based healthy living centre bought and set up in 2004 by public regeneration funding for the people of South Tottenham. It was never intended for it to be taken over by

the PCT for one of their controversial Polyclinics. Such Polyclinics, if set up, are also in danger of being sold off to multinational corporations by the PCT.

- The Council, as leaseholder of The Laurels, will be implicated. They only hold the lease on trust for the people of South Tottenham and should immediately investigate the legal status of the Centre and any plans which would transgress its aims.

Mario Petrou (Save St Ann's Hospital Campaign Group) criticised the plans for a Polyclinic, and spoke up for St Ann's Hospital over the road from The Laurels. He called on the PCT to expand services on the hospital site rather than run them down - it made no sense to move services (like blood testing) into already overcrowded buildings like The Laurels which in any case was set up to complement not replace existing health services.

Cllr Bob Harris (Council Cabinet Member for Adults and Social Services) also spoke out against the plans. Cllr Harris, local Councillor for St Ann's ward in which The Laurels is based, reported that there is a massive mood against the plans locally. He added that he was strongly opposed to the privatisation of NHS services. Cllr Gideon Bull, Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, also spoke out against the privatisation of public services, mentioning the shambles of the railways in particular as a bad example for the NHS to follow. In the light of the current economic crisis he wanted to know from the PCT what would happen if a private supplier went bust.

The PCT have now suspended their privatisation process and have agreed to consult with patients in early December, whilst the Council 'watchdog' committee will reconvene next month following further investigation and updates.

The Laurels Action Group this week launched a public petition and a protest campaign, backed by leaflets and posters. Patients and users will call on the PCT Board to abandon its privatisation plans.