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Dear P.M

THE ROYAL COLLEGES PROPOSAL IS  
ENTIRELY SENSIBLE. IT IS IN SANE  
TO MAKE MAJOR CHANGES, FOR WHICH THE  
INFRASTRUCTURE HAS NOT BEEN PREPARED,  
WITHOUT A PROPER TEST.

THERE IS MUCH TO GAIN FOR THE GOVERNMENT.

PLEASE (1) DON'T RUBBISH THE PROPOSAL,  
AS K CLARKE HAS DONE, BEFORE YOU...

(2) LISTEN TO WHY. I THINK  
YOU CAN REFUSE THE NHS AS A VOTE-LOSER.

Yours.

David W.

# Medical colleges say NHS changes should go on trial

LEADERS of 25 professional organisations representing 500,000 NHS staff yesterday demanded trials for government changes in the health service, warning that otherwise it could collapse.

The Royal Colleges and other bodies representing the medical profession said the proposed changes could turn into "a gigantic and costly experiment with a high risk of failure".

A dozen peers, including three Conservatives, backed the demand and said they would table amendments in the House of Lords to the NHS and Community Care Bill, requiring three-year regional pilot studies of the changes.

The initiative was swiftly condemned by Kenneth Clarke, the Secretary of State for Health, who said it was an attempt to panic the Lords with "ridiculous fears".

The amendments, if accepted, would effectively delay national implementation of the changes until after the next general election. The Bill begins its second reading in the Lords next week.

Lord Ennals, Labour's health spokesman in the Lords and a sponsor of the amendments, said that if the Government accepted the trials then the Labour Party might soften its stance on the Bill.

"We are committed to revoking the controversial changes but if the Government puts these changes into a process of devaluation, then of course the party would think again," he said.

Robin Cook, Labour's health spokesman in the Commons, said that Labour, if elected, would not necessarily abandon the trials, which he believed would prove the flaws in the Government's plans.

Lord Carr, a former Conservative Home Secretary, and two party colleagues, Baroness Faithfull and Lord Auckland, are among the Tories rebelling

By Jack O'Sullivan

against the Government's plans to have the changes in place nationally by April 1991.

Among other sponsors are the Liberal Democratic peers Baroness Seear and Lord Winstanley. Another peer, Lord Walton, a cross-bencher, is a past president of the General Medical Council.

The Royal Colleges called for three-year pilot studies in two regions, one rural and one urban, of the changes which will establish self-governing hospital trusts, budget holding GPs and an internal market for health care within the NHS. They said: "There is no evidence that the changes overall will improve the standard of care, will improve access to care or will improve the cost effectiveness of care. We consider that the timetable of introduction of these changes across the whole NHS in 1991 is completely unrealistic."

Professor Dillwyn Williams, president of the Royal Medical Colleges, said: "We sincerely believe that if the Government's proposals are introduced nationwide there is a grave risk of collapse of the whole health service."

He said chaos would ensue because the necessary infrastructure was not in place, and rapidly developing pay differentials between NHS institutions would produce a two-tier service.

Mr Clarke accused the Royal Colleges of trying to persuade "unelected peers" to put a spoke in legislation late on, after it had passed through the House of Commons almost unchanged.

"There has been far too much campaigning against these reforms, raising ridiculous fears," he said on BBC Radio 4.

"What they would do is create uncertainty and further delay that in itself would have a demoralising effect. What they are asking me to

do is to turn off enthusiastic volunteers who across the country are now well advanced in preparing for the reforms to come in."

Mr Clarke said the first of the "volunteers" would effectively act as trial studies, a claim which Professor Williams denied. Such trials, he said, would assume an internal market across the country for which the infrastructure had not been prepared.

The Royal College of Nursing congress in Brighton, which hosted the initiative, yesterday backed unanimously a resolution demanding that the review body system of national pay awards in the NHS should remain in place after the shake-up.

Many speakers also feared that locally negotiated pay deals could damage salary levels. Fraser Westwood from South Grampian warned: "Our NHS contracts are not going to be worth the paper they are written on. We have got to protect our patients by protecting ourselves."

In an emergency debate on the NHS Bill, the 1,000 congress delegates called unanimously for an independent national inspectorate to monitor clinical standards, a demand rejected on Monday by Virginia Bottomley, the Under-Secretary of State for Health.

■ Mr Clarke was challenged yesterday to investigate an appeal by Surrey GPs for £75,000 from their patients to help complete a new surgery.

Harriet Harman, a Labour health spokesman, said she understood that every household in the villages of Brockham and Newdigate had been leafleted. She claimed that this was the first example of GPs asking their patients to "top-up" family doctor provision from their own pockets - something Mr Clarke has said will not be allowed under the plans for GPs to take budgets for hospital care.

Gay nurses seek RCN rec