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News from Keep Our NHS Public campaign [www.keepournhspublic.com](http://www.keepournhspublic.com)

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## QUESTIONS OVER HEWITT'S ROLE IN PRIVATISED NHS PLAN

The Keep Our NHS Public campaign is calling on Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt to stand by her word and call a halt to plans to allow private companies to take over the functions of NHS primary care trusts (PCTs).

In a letter to the Guardian on 1st July 2006, following a media storm over a 'stealth plan' to allow private companies to take over the commissioning role of PCTs, Patricia Hewitt wrote: "Primary care trusts are and will remain public statutory bodies responsible for using their growing budgets to commission the best possible services for local people. They can never outsource this responsibility, or ask others to make these decisions for them."

It has now emerged that Hillingdon PCT in London has proposed to do exactly that - to hand over almost all of its core functions to the private sector, including the commissioning of care for patients worth millions of pounds, and the provision of community services. The trust's chief executive, Anthony Sumara, said: "I want to get rid of everything, outsource it".

This clearly goes far further than Hewitt indicated in her Guardian letter, when she played down the issue by saying that the government merely wanted to make it easier for PCTs to "buy in some management and support services, including the detailed data analysis that helps to underpin sound commissioning".

The story first came to light in June 2006, when Keep Our NHS Public alerted the press to an advertisement placed by the Department of Health in the Official Journal of the European Union, inviting companies to bid for the chance to spend substantial chunks of the NHS budget.

Following front-page headlines of 'Stealth plan to privatise NHS care' (The Times) and '£64bn NHS privatisation plan revealed' (The Guardian), the government withdrew the advertisement, saying that drafting errors had given the "false impression" that clinical services provided by PCTs would be phased out in favour of the private sector. But the advertisement was resubmitted two weeks later and now Hillingdon PCT plans to use the scheme to outsource its clinical services.

This is despite the fact that Patricia Hewitt wrote in her letter to the Guardian: "Most PCTs also employ district nurses, health visitors and many other frontline staff who provide vital clinical services. They are not affected in any way."

Alex Nunns of Keep Our NHS Public said: "This blows the lid on the government's plan to privatise the NHS by stealth. When this scheme was first uncovered Patricia Hewitt rushed to deny that the story was true. Now our worst fears are coming to pass. This is the patchwork privatisation of the NHS."

Keep Our NHS Public recently released a report, The patchwork privatisation of our health service: a users' guide, which identified the outsourcing of PCT commissioning and care as one of the key threats to the NHS.

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