Failure to talk to public delays private GP plan

BY DEBORAH JAMES
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She said plans for the clinic, initially meant to have opened in August, were delayed by the merger of the Southport and Formby and South Sefton PCTs on October 1.

But she also admitted: “Part of the delay has been because of the consultation. We see now that this extra effort is needed.

“This level of consultation hadn’t been planned for, but with the new PCT and the real emphasis on ownership we think it is worth it to dispel some of the myths.”

She added: “It (the PCT) believes it has already gone through a process of engagement but it also recognises in the next couple of months it needs to re-double that effort.”

The clinic is one of six pilots across the country under the government’s new Alternative Provider Medical Services (APMS) contracts.

Proponents say the new arrangements will boost efficiency.

But members of Keep Our NHS Public (KONP) fear doctors, health care staff and money will be drawn away from the NHS and towards profit-hungry private companies.

Ms Goulding denied quality would be damaged, and said the new clinic was needed to attract GPs to an area where the NHS had found difficulty persuading them to work.

It would also mean longer opening hours at evenings and weekends.

Peter Crowder, spokesman for the newly formed Maghull KONP, formed to fight the GP surgery plan, accused the PCT of “back-pedalling”.

“The consultation is supposed to take place before the tendering process, not after.

“We believe we do have a legal case.

“They have not fulfilled their legal obligation to consult the public, and now they are trying to back-pedal and make it look as though they have consulted us.

“It’s a foregone conclusion now because they’ve chosen a provider, but for the public it’s a choice between this, or this.

“There isn’t any choice for the public, they’ve already decided - so what’s the point of consulting us now?”

He added: “The only consultation they did was about where the clinic should be, not who should operate it.”

Ms Goulding added that GPs in the area had now “opened up” their admission lists, allowing the PCT to see where extra patients could be taken on by existing GPs.

She said there was little chance the plan would be dropped, but if an existing surgery had the capacity to take on an extra 200 patients, then that “would have to be looked at.”

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