

Kids beds crisis

A WINTER outbreak of meningitis has exposed a drastic shortfall of intensive care beds for children across the country.

London's flagship Great Ormond Street Hospital has turned away 150 sick children in the past year, with 8 of its 19 intensive care beds closed.

A detailed investigation by the *Independent* in January revealed that at least 300 children had been turned away from paediatric units in the last year, some of whom subsequently died.

Cash crunch

In Leeds, 7 of the 18 paediatric intensive care beds at St James Hospital are closed for lack of cash; the General Infirmary has been turning away a child a day from IC beds.

31 children had been turned away since September from the Royal Manchester Children's Hospital, and 21 from Bristol Children's Hospital since November. Sheffield refused treatment to 52 children in the last 3 months of 1995.

London's St Mary's Hospital had turned away 41 children with meningitis in 1995.

This tragic evidence that today's NHS can no longer cope with the demands of a British winter must underline the need for new cash to reopen these crucial front-line beds.

London's hospitals wait for private cash

15 schemes worth £11m and upwards, and totalling as much as £750m, from all over London, are likely to be caught up in the bureaucratic procedures of the government's controversial Private Finance Initiative.

Under this scheme, Trusts are obliged to seek private cash to fund major developments costing over £5 million, before any government cash will be forthcoming. Kenneth Clarke's 1995 budget cut 17% from NHS capital spending, presuming that private firms would step (profitably) into the breach.

London schemes caught in the lengthy delays and negotiations of PFI bids now or in the near future include:

Royal Brompton Trust: £28m land-swap scheme involving McAlpine Healthcare expected for rubber stamp delayed and now halted by NHS Executive pending other London

changes..

■ Wellhouse Trust:

Phase 1b of Barnet General Hospital rebuild (crucial for closure of Edgware Hospital acute services). Phase 1a already under way (£29m). Estimated value Phase 1b £30m. A consortium of four firms has been selected, and a business plan submitted in November for Treasury and NHS Executive approval.

■ Greenwich Healthcare:

£28m redevelopment of Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital site in Woolwich as single-site general hospital to replace Brook and Greenwich DGH.

■ West Middlesex Hospital Trust:

£11 million scheme to redevelop theatres and wards. Scheme pending approval.

■ Mount Vernon/Watford General Trust:

Rationalisation of A&E and elective acute services, consultation completed February 1995.



Defending public services against Fat Cat private profiteers: UNISON's October 21 demonstration

capital costs variously estimated at £19m-£28m.

■ Royal Hospitals Trust:

Redevelopment at Royal London Hospital to enable closure of Bart's and London Chest Hospital, £237m.

■ Homerton Hospital:

£18m development, leaving unresolved the issue of paediatric services in Hackney, despite threatened closure of Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Children. Strong rumours suggest Homerton money will not be forthcoming.

■ Guy's-St Thomas's Trust:

£70m redevelopment at St Thomas's to facilitate closure of acute and A&E services at Guy's.

■ UCL Hospitals Trust:

£115m scheme to 'centralise' services on redeveloped UCH site, closing Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Middlesex and Tropical Diseases Hospitals, (with loss of 155 acute beds and 600 jobs) endorsed in November by Camden & Islington Health Authority.

■ King's College Hospital:

New neuroscience unit endorsed by Bottomley in April. No details available.

■ Queen Charlotte's Maternity Hospital

Closure, with services transferred to Ham-

me Smith Hospital, partly in new build premises.

Claimed cost £9 million. Trust suggests finance through land swap.

Other schemes likely to fall into PFI include

■ Harold Wood Hospital:

Phases 2 and 3: 49 paediatric beds, 168 acute beds, 8 ITU beds; 68 neuroscience beds and twin theatres — to enable run-down of Oldchurch Hospital. No capital costs published, but likely to cost over £30m.

■ Edgware Community Hospital:

New scheme for closure of Napsbury (mental illness) and Colindale (elderly care) hospitals, to relocate services on Edgware Hospital site after closure of acute services. Currently out to consultation. No published costings, but likely to cost over £22m. Possible deal involving land swap from large Edgware site.

■ Newham:

Close St Andrew's Hospital and 'centralise' services on Newham General site. £30m. Currently out to consultation.

■ Atkinson Morley's Hospital:

Regional neuroscience review group has recommended closure, with services moved to St George's Hospital (with no capital costs identified). Consultation document still awaited. Likely cost of re-opening current service not less than £50 million.

Keep up the campaigning in '96!

UNISON'S newly elected General Secretary, Rodney Bickerstaffe, writes for Health Emergency



find an intensive care bed.

Over 40 kids with meningitis turned away from the specialist unit at St Mary's Hospital in London because it has run out of paediatric intensive care beds.

The reports of the sheer scale of the crisis are now coming in on a daily basis:

Patients stacked up on trolleys in corridors for three days or more through a lack of beds.

Casualty departments forced to close their doors to blue light ambulances because they are simply full to bursting point.

Seriously ill patients in a life or death condition ferried miles away from their local hospital in a dash to

the battle to save the NHS continues to be fought out by local people linking up with the hospital staff.

That's the crucial link that we need to maintain and develop throughout this year. Let's get to it!

RHA shock blast for Dorrell

HEALTH Secretary Stephen Dorrell was treated to an unusual spectacle when he joined the platform of a West Midlands Health Conference in Birmingham on January 13.

A non-executive director of the Regional Health Authority, Mr Bijan Sedghi, got up to protest at plans to merge Solihull Hospital with Heartlands Hospital, and the threat this poses to A&E, paediatric and maternity services.

■ Quangos

Regional Health Authorities, quango bodies selected by government ministers, have until now been noted for their docile acceptance of spending cuts and hospital closures.

No doubt seeing this rare display of independence Mr Dorrell must have been relieved

that his predecessor Virginia Bottomley had already decided to scrap them and replace them with teams of secretive civil servants from April 1.

Criticised

The well-attended conference, sponsored by the Birmingham *Evening Mail*, saw the level of health services in the region criticised on all fronts.

Birmingham council leader Theresa Stewart denounced cuts in the city's health budget.

Another Birmingham councillor slammed cuts in geriatric beds which had created a crisis in care of the elderly.

Even the chair of Birmingham Health Authority argued that the government should put proper funding into social services so that they, like the NHS, could be provided free of charge.

Affiliate!

ONCE AGAIN Health Emergency is at the forefront of the fight against cuts, closures and the half-baked theories on which government policies are now based.

We were the first to reject the now discredited King's Fund-Bottomley-Dorrell theory that GP services can replace axed hospital beds. We are now stepping up the fight London-wide, and looking for closer links with campaigns and health unions across the country.

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