

# What would £20 billion cuts look like?

The King's Fund's chief economist John Appleby has recently spelled out the scale of threat to the NHS from the coming cash squeeze.

Arguing in the *British Medical Journal* (17 August) in favour of protection of the NHS against the general round of cuts affecting most other public services, he argues that if the NHS were not protected it would have to find actual cuts amounting to around 14% of its budget (£18 billion) over the next few years, and suggests five ways it could do this:

- \* 30% real pay cut for all staff

- \* Abolish the NHS in London

No drugs

- \* Sack all consultants and general practitioners

- \* Abolish the NHS in Scotland and Wales

A different approach would be "for whole services to close down: no NHS dentistry (£2bn), no community services (£9bn), no ophthalmic services (£0.5bn) – and still another £6.5bn to find".

He sums up: "Fourteen per cent is equivalent to £18bn for the UK NHS. This is not a cut that can be achieved through a bit of salami slicing of everyone's budgets. The NHS would have to think at least on the scale of the suggestions above."

Appleby makes the obvious point that none of these proposals is very appealing.

But the ConDem White paper looks to make £20 billion of 'efficiency savings' by 2014.

So are we going to let them do it?