

Tory worries about privatisation.



Some senior cabinet ministers, according to the Health Service Journal, have described the Conservative government's changes to the NHS as “one of the biggest mistakes made by the coalition government”.

On 22 May, the BBC reported that the government was having second thoughts about key aspects of their 2012 Health and Social Care Act that forced Clinical Commissioning Groups to put out NHS contracts to the private market:

“The Lansley reforms, remember them? Those changes to the NHS that reorganised everything, cost lots and lots and lots of money, and really stretched David Cameron's perpetual efforts to show he loved the NHS? Well some elements of them might, just might be on the way out. ... And government is considering whether or not those reforms could include scrapping or changing bits of the 2012 legislation.”

That same day, however, the government told the *Health Service Journal* that there would be no new legislation:

“Government sources have told HSJ today there are no plans to bring forward legislation to reform the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

The BBC has reported today that ministers could be preparing to bring forward plans to repeal parts of the legislation brought in under former health secretary Lord Lansley.

The 2012 legislation has previously been described by senior cabinet ministers as one of the biggest mistakes made by the coalition government, and has been blamed for causing widespread

fragmentation in the NHS and being a barrier to changes necessary to integrate care.”

But government bodies such as the Health Select Committee and the National Audit Office have been increasingly critical of the how the NHS is being run.

The National Audit Office recently warned that patients have been “put at serious risk of harm” by the failure of a £330m outsourcing exercise which NHS England contracted to the private firm Capita in a bid to cut costs. Reports from the National Audit Office are normally submitted to the relevant department and a text agreed before it is published. So some in the Department of Health are beginning to worry about the negative stories coming out of privatisation failures.

In May this year, a government minister, George Eustace, publicly criticized privatisation that was “fragmenting” the NHS. Speaking about the Health and Social Care Act of 2012, Mr Eustace [said](#):

“There are some elements where it requires them to go to tender when it might be sensible not to go to tender.”

The prominent Conservative chair of the Health Select Committee, Sarah Wollaston, has also publicly called on the government to halt implementation of its planned Accountable Care Organisations which critics have opposed because they see these ACOs as vehicles for even greater privatisation. According to [a report](#) in *The Independent* in January 2018:

“A senior Conservative MP has called on Jeremy Hunt to put the brakes on plans which campaigners have previously claimed could open the NHS to privatisation.

Sarah Wollaston, the chair of the Commons Health Committee, has written to the Health and Social Care Secretary urging him to delay a new contract for Accountable Care Organisations (ACOs) – due to be implemented later this year.”

Jonathan Ashworth MP, Labour’s Shadow Health Secretary, [said](#):

”Sarah Wollaston has made an important and welcome contribution to the debate about so called Accountable Care Organisations. Ministers have failed to reassure us these won’t be a vehicle for large-scale private sector involvement in running local health services.

“Given the Carillion debacle this call from the Health Select Committee Chair is timely and must not be dismissed by Jeremy Hunt.”

Labour [has promised to repeal](#) the Health and Social Care Act:

“Labour will scrap the disastrous Health and Social Care Act, end Tory outsourcing and privatisation, and give the NHS the funding that it needs.”

Obviously some Tories are worried that underfunding and privatisation of the NHS could have electoral consequences for the party and it appears likely that May will announce some limited increase in NHS funding this summer. But the Tories are fundamentally committed to the marketisation of NHS services and the organisations that are promoted as a way to overcome NHS fragmentation, Accountable Care Organisations, are themselves set up in such a way that they can be outsourced to private companies.