



Tories would ditch NHS 'preferred provider' policy

The Shadow Secretary of State for Health, Andrew Lansley, would return to an 'any willing provider policy, within NHS quality standards, and within NHS prices' if they win the general election next year.

Speaking at the NHS Employers conference in Birmingham, he criticised the Government's NHS 'preferred provider' approach, stating that "...we must look for whoever is best able to deliver the care we want for patients", as well as emphasising a need for a new relationship between health services and local independent and voluntary sector services.

He also envisaged a greater role for social enterprises in the health service, including employee-owned 'John Lewis' models on a smaller scale, citing the better employee engagement and innovation that would result.

The Secretary of State for Health, Andy Burnham, recently announced that NHS providers would be the 'preferred provider' where provision is good and there would be no need to look at the market. There would also be a "clear, staged process with a timetable for improvement leading to an open tender" where existing provision is poor. New or significantly redesigned services would be required to engage with a range of providers before deciding whether to issue an open tender, with good NHS providers being given the chance to bid to provide these services.

The Tory approach differs from that of the Government in that they appear to favour open competition on the 'any willing provider' basis, where any provider can bid to provide the service so long as they meet NHS quality and payment criteria, regardless of their status. The any willing provider approach is already in place for routine elective care which is designed to offer patients greater choice in where to obtain treatment. It remains to be seen what the detail of their policy will look like and how it would work across all services.

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