

# Mutualisation: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

A UNISON Briefing for Members



Your employer is one of nine trusts in England to become a 'Mutuals in Healthcare Pathfinder'.

UNISON is very concerned that mutual status is likely to be a stepping stone to private companies taking over health services. This would have a disastrous impact on patients and staff.

Mutual status in itself would pose serious risks to employee pay and conditions and pension arrangements.

UNISON believes that mutualisation is really about dismantling our NHS and that mutual status would be the wrong way to go for this trust.

It's not too late. We can stop this damaging proposal.

**Why is mutualisation a threat to the NHS?:** Before the NHS was created, there was a patchwork of mutuals providing health services. There was no consistency in access to services, care quality or employment arrangements. Mutualisation is about turning back the clock to before the NHS. We need our NHS's assets to be owned by everybody – because the NHS is for everybody who needs it.

**What is the 'mutual model' that is being proposed?:** Mutualisation is not about a more co-operative or collegiate management style – it is about a change in ownership. Mutuals would no longer be in the public sector and would no longer be run in the public interest. In an employee-owned mutual, staff would take on the uncertain benefits and enormous risks of ownership. Where the organisation made a loss the owners – the staff – would have to make up the shortfall from somewhere. This is high risk and it would change the nature of the organisation that you work for.



**Why would mutual status lead to big private sector companies taking over?** Most health trusts are under serious financial pressure and many rely on occasional bail-outs from Central Government to keep them afloat. A mutual would not be in the public sector and it could not receive Government financial support in the same way. Also, the organisation would have to begin to pay VAT. In the likely event of a mutual provider coming under financial pressure there is the very real threat of a private sector takeover. All employee terms and conditions could then be up for grabs.

**Why is mutualisation being considered?** We think this is a Trojan horse for privatisation. The people proposing mutualisation in health are the same people behind the attacks on public sector services, pay and pensions. Francis Maude, the Cabinet Minister responsible for this policy, has said that “mutualisation is a form of privatisation”.



**Arch-privatiser Francis Maude is promoting mutualisation in the NHS.**

**Isn't this just about improving employee engagement?:** No. While it is true that NHS staff feel under pressure and disempowered, we do not think this is because staff want to be responsible for owning the organisations that provide services. It is more to do with inadequate funding for the NHS and, on occasion, poor management. It would be possible to improve staff involvement in decision-making and morale without changing the ownership structure of the organisation.

**What are the threats to staff?**

Changing the nature of the organisation brings into question whether Agenda for Change pay and conditions will be respected for employees. Moreover, pension arrangements may become subject to local change.

**What can I do?:** What staff think about mutualisation should matter. The Government is providing £100,000 to a consultancy organisation to consider how mutualisation might work here. The trust has not signed up to become a mutual – just to look into whether or not mutual status would be of benefit. It's not too late. Staff should be included in the Pathfinder consultation process and if we make it clear that we do not want mutual status then we can stop it.

If you work at one of the affected trusts in the North West and would like to get involved in the campaign against mutualisation, please contact Angela Twigg; [a.twigg@unison.co.uk](mailto:a.twigg@unison.co.uk)