

'Flawed' purchaser-provider split must go, BMA tells MPs

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LOOK AFTER OUR NHS
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ENGLAND SHOULD follow the example of Scotland and Wales and abandon the 'flawed' purchaser-provider split, MPs heard last week.

BMA council chairman Hamish Meldrum told the Commons health select committee inquiry into commissioning that there was little evidence that the system, first introduced in 1991, had improved the quality of healthcare.

'[The BMA] has never been a fan of the purchaser-provider split,' Dr Meldrum said. 'The environment of competition between providers, [and] having these discussions between a variety

of providers and the commissioner have not been that helpful — particularly if you are going to get effective healthcare and not duplication or gaps in the system.'

He added that the market hindered the establishment of good joined-up care for patients, and increased bureaucracy and transaction costs. He said there was little evidence to support the view that the 'creative discomfort' of competition had improved quality of care and cut costs, as was intended.

Dr Meldrum said: 'I hope we aren't stuck with the present system because ...

we have had it for 20 years and, despite all the changes we have tried, it has not worked...

'I would not want to say that we should tinker yet again with this system to try to make it work, because I think there is a fundamental flaw in it.'

The select committee inquiry is examining whether the purchaser-provider split has been a success for the NHS in England. It is also considering the effectiveness of PCT commissioning and the World Class Commissioning initiative, and how system-reform initiatives such as practice based commissioning, contestability, the quasi-market and payment by results have interacted.

The BMA's concerns about the introduction of a market in the NHS prompted the launch of the Look After Our NHS campaign.

Dr Meldrum said he would like to see a new 'collaborative model' of commissioning.

Department of Health acting director general of commissioning Gary Belfield told MPs the purchaser-provider split was needed but not enough emphasis had been placed on commissioning. He conceded that providers had been too powerful and NHS structural reorganisations had impeded continuity and stability.

Read the BMA's views on commissioning at www.lookafterournhs.org.uk