

Angry doctors oppose plan to axe 5,600 beds in London

BY MIKE FOSTER

LONDON DOCTORS will fight controversial plans that could shut 5,600 hospital beds and affect a dozen district general hospitals.

Doctors attending a special BMA London regional council-organised meeting last week called for action against NHS London's proposals that could downgrade or close around 12 district general hospitals.

London consultant radiologist Jacky Davis called on doctors to get involved through local negotiating committees, local medical committees or hospital medical staff committees and to

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organise resistance by engaging with MPs, local newspapers, and overview and scrutiny committees.

She said: 'I just don't think it is good enough to keep our collective heads down and hope it will all go away. This is a fight worth fighting; don't think it is a done deal.'

Around 200 doctors from all branches of practice, members of local campaign groups including Keep Our NHS Public, patients and local trade union representatives gathered at the London On the Brink meeting, held at BMA House, to discuss NHS London's plans, as set out in *Delivering Healthcare for London — An Integrated Strategic Plan 2010–2015*.

NHS London wants to shift 55 per cent of outpatient services and 60 per cent of emergency department

activity out of hospitals and into 102 polysystems in the community, in a bid to tackle an estimated £5bn budget shortfall by 2017.

Polysystems are networks of new polyclinics linked with GP practices. Each system would focus on providing more healthcare in patients homes, including care of minor injuries, case management of long-term conditions routine diagnostics and psychological therapy services.

London consultant breast surgeon Anna Athow said the strategic health authority's plan designated nine hospitals as major acute or trauma centres but that left many others facing an uncertain future.

BMA GPs committee chair Laurence Buckman said that the 'one-size-fits-all' approach of polyclinics in every neighbourhood would not work.

Dr Buckman said: 'These cuts will turn a crisis in healthcare into a disaster for some. It is another example of evidence-free politics ruling healthcare.'

London Health Emergency information director John Lister, author of a report commissioned by the LRC, *London's NHS: On the Brink*, said the plans aimed to cut hospital beds by a third in London and would mean seven million patients a year, who were currently seen in hospitals, instead being seen in polysystems that 'don't even exist on paper'.

Mr Lister said it would be 'an absolute shambles'.

LRC chair Kevin O'Kane urged doctors to attend a rally with other trade unions in London on April 10. Doctors were also asked to sign up to the BMA's Look After Our NHS campaign.

Dr O'Kane said: 'We are not prepared to stand by and watch London's health services be butchered.'

Visit www.10410demo.co.uk for details of the march on April 10. To find out about the BMA's anti-marketisation campaign, visit www.lookafterournhs.org.uk

BMA members can access the LRC site at www.bma.org.uk/representation/local_representation/regional_councils/LondonRegionalCouncil.jsp



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