CHANGE HERE

The NHS, with 1.7 million employees, is the world’s fifth largest employer, after the American and Chinese military, Walmart, and McDonald’s. However, unlike armies and chain stores, one of the hallmarks of the NHS is variation and inconsistency — in procedures, practices, and outcomes — and uniform and systemic change is difficult to initiate and sustain. Yet change has also been one of the constant features of the NHS, and further changes are essential if it is to survive. Two recent reports, by Professor Sir Bruce Keogh1 and Professor Don Berwick,2 in the wake of the Francis report and other alarm signals, emphasise the need for large-scale, trans-organisational changes, and also highlight the vulnerability of medium-sized organisations within the NHS, such as hospital trusts, to the failings and foibles of individuals in clinical and management roles. Both reports also reflect uncomfortable truths about the unhealthy management culture that seems to have permeated the NHS from top to bottom.

The Health Secretary’s latest plans include creating a ‘7-day NHS’ which, as well as having implications for the controversy surrounding the provision of out-of-hours primary care, will also expose the serious fault lines that have emerged in staffing levels of doctors and nurses. A blight on efficiency and the transforming potential of proper IT systems are also key ingredients. An editorial and the transforming potential of proper IT of doctors and nurses. A blitz on inefficiency and the failure to make the most of IT, a further contribution to this debate from Ilora Finlay in this issue of the BJGP, continues the debate initiated in the Nuffield Institute for Health Research’s report on the health and social care of the elderly in England.2

The analogy with the commercial sector breaks down when recognising the absolute centrality of individuals (clinicians, researchers, managers, and others) to the organisation, service delivery, and trust. The role of the patient, and the need for their views to be known; the consultation period ends on 9 October.

Roger Jones
Editor

REFERENCES