



# The Perils of Industrialised Healthcare

Exploring the limitations of the King's Fund report:  
"Reforming the NHS from Within"

A DISCUSSION PAPER FROM THE CENTRE FOR WELFARE REFORM

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Why does our NHS show such features of unhappy unrest? Common answers are something like: 'inadequate funding or management for increasing healthcare demands'.

Yet all too often commentaries about how to reform the NHS are provided by those who have a vested interest in trying to change it. Rarely do we listen to those who have a long experience of working in the NHS and who simply want to share what they've learned. This has led to decades of cumulatively destructive structural reform, often disguising the growing power of Whitehall and, worse still, those who seek commercial gain.

One of the consequences of the endless search for a new system, the panacea of structural reform, is that those who actually work in the system have become increasingly alienated, cynical, mistrustful and depressed. Some changes may be advisable and inevitable, but change for the sake of political posturing and privatisation has been mostly destructive of our better innovation, trust and then any vocational spirit or sustainable personal commitment.

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In this paper David Zigmond illuminates the internal and implicit factors that ensure the effectiveness of the NHS: relationships of trust, closeness to community, and a human scale. All of these have been sacrificed by recent decades of reforms that have imposed phoney competition, privatisation and often strangulating bureaucratic regulations on practitioners' better skills and judgements. However, even important allies of the NHS, like the King's Fund, struggle to understand what really matters to the people who use and work in the NHS. Our reforms have, again and again, turned people into managed robots – mere agents of our good intentions. We forget that bigger is not always better.

It is time to stop trying to reform the NHS from top down and, instead, listen to those who use it and those who work in it. In particular, we need now to reclaim our humanity, and end the commercialised and over-policed industrialisation of healthcare.

This paper from The Centre for Welfare Reform explores all this, and what we might otherwise do.

Tractors replace not only mules but people. They cultivate to the very door of the houses of those whom they replace.

Dorothea Lange and Paul S. Taylor

An American Exodus. A record of human erosion, 1939



*Photo: Tractored out. Dorothea Lange, 1938*

The full paper, *The Perils of Industrialised Healthcare*,  
is available as a free download from  
the Centre for Welfare Reform.

[www.centreforwelfarereform.org](http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org)

It may also be purchased from Amazon.

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