

## From the Editor

### Independence for the NHS?

Change is an opportunity for a fresh look at established practice. As the new prime minister, Gordon Brown, takes over in Downing Street he will not be short of advice as to how he might run the NHS.

The Nuffield Trust, an independent body to review policy in the delivery of health services, commissioned a report in 2006 to examine a range of different management models that might be applied to the NHS. This report included an analysis of the issues that need to be considered before any new approach can be promoted.

With a stroke of brilliant timing, Brian Edwards, Emeritus Professor of Healthcare Development at the University of Sheffield, delivered a report just before the door of Number 10 opened for Brown.<sup>1</sup> The report examines a range of possible models for delivering healthcare but the concept of NHS independence has captured the imagination of many. Indeed the Conservative Party is already preparing its own NHS Independence Bill.

The argument runs that it is time for the NHS to stop being used as a political football because of the negative impact this has on staff morale, decision-making, recruitment and doctor-patient relationships. The potential loss of political accountability for the spending of £90 billion each year is the main objection to this approach although the government is used to regulatory control at a distance, for example at the BBC and the Post Office.

Some commentators feel that even more dramatic change is needed. Anatole Kaletsky, the economics correspondent of *The Times*, recently commented that the real financial challenges for the government were not in foreign policy but in health and education. He forecast that the cost of both will rise

so rapidly in the decade ahead that no government will be able to finance them adequately through taxation alone.

Contributions to the debate particularly from a medical perspective are welcome and could be aired in the Journal. How should healthcare be provided in the UK in the years ahead? Can healthcare continue to be provided free at the point of receipt? Clinicians, in the interests of the patients they serve, are perhaps best placed to inform that debate.

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### Reference

- 1 Edwards B. *An independent NHS: a review of the options*. London: Nuffield Trust, 2007. [www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/ecomm/files/IndependentNHS.pdf](http://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/ecomm/files/IndependentNHS.pdf)

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### Readership survey 2007

We are keen to develop the journal in line with the interests of Fellows and Members and would like to adapt the content appropriately. A short but important survey is currently online and will be active until the end of August:

<http://forms.rcplondon.ac.uk/formserver/clinicalmedicinereadershipsurvey>

We look forward to receiving your comments.

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