
"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Rogin the Armchair Fan - 05-07-2008 20:37

Fascinating documentary on the formation of the NHS, and where it all went wrong, on at the moment. Unfortunately I can't follow it all too clearly because the sound's turned right down, because my daughters are just dropping off to sleep.

However, my over-riding memory of the name "Nye Bevan" comes from that classic Not The Nine O'Clock News sketch (Gangster Octopus to thread) where a spoof "Question Time" Panel are asked the question, "Given that the Soviet Union has just launched 200 nuclear warheads that will destroy the United Kingdom and everyone in it in four minutes' time, what would the panel recommend doing next?"

And Rowan Atkinson (I think it was he) playing the part of a Welsh Trade Union leader, mused, "Well, at times likes these, I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done. And you know, I'm pretty sure he'd have shat himself".

Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Rogin the Armchair Fan - 05-07-2008 20:59

ha, found it, you'll forgive my misremembering paraphrasing earlier. It wasn't Rowan Atkinson, it was the bloke playing Clive Jenkins.

Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Purves Grundy - 05-07-2008 21:20

What a great programme that was. They could do contempt and anger so well.

Titting up and down on the willy bum goolie

Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Izbušen dana Ples - 05-07-2008 22:37

I don't know why but I am heartened that Bevan was 51 when he brought in the National Health Service.

It means that there is still time for me to do something important like that - although not much time

I think that Harry maintains that the statue of Bevan in Cardiff shows him wearing a cardigan but I would say that it is clearly a waistcoat

http://farm1.static.flickr.com/160/428581888_2af4325b02.jpg?v=1174436463

Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by E10 Rifle - 06-07-2008 00:24

where it all went wrong

Not having seen the programme, can I ask where it has gone wrong. I mean sure, the NHS has been fucked around with, abused and kicked around for political and economic gain like nobody's business, but I'm always wary of people saying that the concept of things like the NHS, and for example comprehensive education, have been "proven failures", when no such proof really exists and in fact such arguments are specious bollocks.

Having the NHS is still better than not having it.

Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Gambrinus - 06-07-2008 07:13

Not having seen the programme, can I ask where it has gone wrong

Millions of pounds wasted on a shithouse computer system that doesn't work, the poor sods who do the actual work on the ground not getting paid enough, politicians shitting all over it, too much bad management, too much money being wasted, the people who do the work not getting paid enough, the general public demanding everything NOW.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 06-07-2008 07:25

Of course it's silly to describe the NHS as "a failure", but it's really not a good way of allocating healthcare in the modern age. It's interesting that no other country ever copied this model of provision.

Having used the German health system, which is unarguably superior. I think a compulsory insurance-based system, with the state paying the insurance for the people who can't afford it, is an inherently better model.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Rogin the Armchair Fan - 06-07-2008 07:40

I thought we did have a compulsory insurance-based system, with the state picking up the tab for those who can't afford it? I don't think the funding model can be a root cause of why other countries' healthcare systems are any better or worse than ours.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 06-07-2008 08:00

I thought we did have a compulsory insurance-based system, with the state picking up the tab for those who can't afford it?

Not really. National Insurance is essentially the same as income tax. In a lot of continental systems, you pay into an insurance system and the insurer (or government body) purchases healthcare on your behalf.

In the NHS, the NHS is purchaser and provider. Although the government do want to move towards a commissioning model.

It's not the only problem with the NHS. I agree it's not well managed, but I doubt whether the public is prepared to stump up more cash to pay better managers.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Bombanersson - 06-07-2008 08:15

I've used the Finnish system, which is a similar model to the German one, and unless you have a good job it's utter, utter shit. Even if you do have a good job it's quite dodgy to have your doctor writing sicknotes and dependent on employers liking their work.

Of course, it's the 'most cost-efficient system in the world', which is great if you want to die slowly and in pain because they don't want to treat you.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by Ralph Dangerfish - 06-07-2008 09:48

National Insurance is essentially the same as income tax

Not quite. The rate is 11% for income up to £40,000 per year- but only 1% above that threshold.

It's a regressive tax, even if those on incomes greater than £36,000 pay higher rate income tax.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 06-07-2008 10:49

Okay, but that wasn't the point I was trying to make. Putting it very simplistically, National Insurance and Income Tax go into the same government pot and are spent however the government chooses. In addition, National Insurance is nominally for all sorts of things -- state pensions, unemployment benefits and healthcare to name a few.

National Insurance contributions bear very little relationship to the health insurance I'm paying here in Germany. I also have the choice to pay into whatever insurance scheme I want to, be it state or private.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Bored Of Football - 06-07-2008 16:16

Yes, but the waistcoat/cardigan debate, what do we think?

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by TonTon - 06-07-2008 23:31

Don't worry, Stumpers, we're getting all choiced up over here, oh yes indeedy. Who needs decent health provision when you can have choice, eh?

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by Amor de Cosmos - 07-07-2008 00:03

I think a compulsory insurance-based system, with the state paying the insurance for the people who can't afford it, is an inherently better model.

Not necessarily. That's the Canadian model which is better than the NHS in some ways but worse in others. I've had a fair amount of indirect experience of both in the past eight years and think neither system is a clear winner. The NHS is much more of a lottery. The difference in quality between individual trusts is astonishing when compared to Canada where, in my experience the standard of treatment, coast to coast, is reasonably uniform. Far better than the some of the NHS trusts, inferior to others. However the Canadian system is seriously, and increasingly, underfunded and, unlike the UK, private medical care virtually unobtainable. Given rising costs and aging population the pressure to maintain quality will become financially crippling in coming decades, unless there are fundamental changes to the Canada Health Act. A document that's viewed here with the same degree of sacredness as the Declaration of Independence is to the south of us.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by toro toro - 07-07-2008 00:40

What E10 said. For all the problems which it has encountered/have been lumped upon it, it remains Britain's shining light unto the world.

I was out drinking with my cousin a week or two ago, in the bar he works at in Fulham. One of the manager's mates was around, acting as though anybody liked him. Total and utter cvntbag, it came as no surprise in the slightest that he worked for the Tory party. I harangued him briefly, and let it go.

Six hours later, we were in a nightclub. Everybody clearly hated the guy, with the sole exception of the bar manager, who tolerated the guy since he (a) had been in school with him and (b) shared a flat with his (ie the manager's) girlfriend. Fucker sneers at me, in my Adidas/Cuba tracky top. What, he wants to know, have "bloody socialists" ever done for this country, for any country?

I unzipped the tracky top, and hoisted up my t-shirt. I showed him, and everyone else, the long scar that runs around from my chest to my back on the left-hand side.

"A year ago," I said, "I was hospitalised. I'm a foreign national, I was in there for a month, and not once did anybody ask me how I was going to pay for this. In fact, when I enquired, they told me not to worry. My concern was to get better. Any country which can afford to do that, and doesn't, is barbarian. That's socialism, and I am fucking proud to be a fucking socialist."

God bless the NHS.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Rogin the Armchair Fan - 07-07-2008 07:03

But does the same worthy socialist sentiment extend to a country that can afford to give people free massages, pedicures, cosmetic dental treatment, and counselling for general anxiety, amongst other things, but doesn't? Someone said above, one of "the problems" of the NHS is that public have grown to simply expect too much from it. What should the NHS be there for, after fixing broken bones and stitching up bits that are leaking?

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 07-07-2008 07:47

" ... it remains Britain's shining light unto the world."

This is what I don't understand – there's a knee-jerk response to idea of the NHS that transcends all common sense sometimes.

I don't think anyone on this board would argue that British healthcare is superior to the French, Spanish, Dutch and German systems (to name a few). There are still waiting lists for treatment. Our cancer survival rates are among the lowest in Europe.

Why is this the envy of the world exactly? I'm all for universal healthcare, but I find the organisation of the NHS frankly Stalinist.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by E10 Rifle - 07-07-2008 08:12

"Stalinist" FFS. I've heard a few bad stories but none of staff being purged and marched off to gulags in the middle of the night. Nowt like a bit of perspective.

Terrific post Toro. Wish I'd been on that piss-up.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 07-07-2008 08:18

Okay then, unresponsive, inflexible, bureaucratic and slow.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by E10 Rifle - 07-07-2008 08:19

I'd be intrigued as to how an insurance-based "choice" system would make this less bureaucratic

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 07-07-2008 08:22

So if you think the organisation of the NHS isn't an issue, why are we lagging behind every other service in western Europe?

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Donald Potts - 07-07-2008 08:24

It seems to me that the NHS was the envy of the world, but a near 30 year period of governments desperately trying to make it run more like a corporation have turned it into a shadow of its former self.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by E10 Rifle - 07-07-2008 08:25

Are we? Have you got something to back that up? I mean I think the NHS has got problems - the unevenness of treatment across areas, the endless reforms, the problematic internal market, the PFI wastes etc - but I can't see your solutions doing much to eradicate them.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by The Chubby Cyclist - 07-07-2008 08:44

I always find the focus on "problems" in the NHS to be weird. Every time I've had to use the NHS they've been effective, fairly efficient, friendly, everything seems relatively new, and relatively clean. It's much better now than 10 years ago, and it was better then than 10 years before. And it offers a ton more treatments now, too. If there've been times it's been slow, that's because, frankly, fixing me with a dodgy knee is something that should always be lower priority than people with life-threatening or life-changing conditions.

The way people always talk about "failure" or even "problems" means that there's a general widespread feeling that the NHS is a horrible disaster area, and this pervasive attitude is what drives the nonsense pushes for "choice" and partial privatisation and the introduction of insurance premiums, and all that crap.

Re:\\"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done\\"

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 07-07-2008 08:51

I personally haven't argued that the NHS is a disaster area, but the British still lag behind most of our neighbours on several important treatment outcomes. We also have fewer doctors per head of population and we still have waiting lists. I could dig out more statistics if I had time.

"... frankly, fixing me with a dodgy knee is something that should always be lower priority than people with life-threatening or life-changing conditions."

There's no reason why both groups can't be seen to promptly. A friend of mine was in hospital in Germany a week after a skiing accident. I don't think her operation was at the expense of someone more deserving.

Re:\\"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by E10 Rifle - 07-07-2008 09:24

We also have fewer doctors per head of population

There's a debate to be had about why that is, of course.

Re:\\"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by Rogin the Armchair Fan - 07-07-2008 09:26

QUOTE:

We also have fewer doctors per head of population

There's a debate to be had about why that is, of course.

One which could quickly lead into "too many bloody immigrants who we shouldn't even be letting into the wards".

Careful, now, everyone.

Re:\\"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by E10 Rifle - 07-07-2008 10:50

An argument easily batted back by pointing out the huge numbers of immigrants staffing the wards

Re:\\"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by NetzerHölzenbeinHrubesch - 07-07-2008 10:56

Stumpy - you keep talking about outcomes and shit like that as if there are some magic stats which prove the case, but we've yet to see them. What mechanisms do you measure a health system by?

Well, everyone must be able to use it without fear of the cost. Any system in which fear of cost inhibits use is a failure. But beyond that, there's equality of treatment. We've some way to go on that, but that's precisely because of the attempt to make the NHS more corporate. But do more people die of things in the UK which they'd not die of if we had a different system? Do more people live lives of misery compared to other countries?

For my own part, the NHS is the only thing I can muster anything approximating pride for in this country.

Re:

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 07-07-2008 11:03

toro toro wrote:

"A year ago," I said, "I was hospitalised. I'm a foreign national, I was in there for a month, and not once did anybody ask me how I was going to pay for this. In fact, when I enquired, they told me not to worry. My concern was to get better. Any country which can afford to do that, and doesn't, is barbarian. That's socialism, and I am fucking proud to be a fucking socialist."

God bless the NHS.

Seriously: a lump in the throat. That's so very much the case. (Apart, of course, from the subject of the last sentence.)

Let's by all means talk about other approaches to not being barbarian--approaches, for example, that might make the system less of a hostage to the whims of central government. But that principle--you're ill; we'll treat; the money side is sorted--is what it's all about. It was, and remains, a huge victory for Our Side, and there haven't been enough of those that we can afford to take that one for granted.

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Re:

Posted by Tactical Genius - 07-07-2008 11:49

Posting from an NHS establishment:

Speaking as someone who is currently working on one of those "shit IT systems that don't work and cost millions of £££" and has worked for about half a dozen Government departments, I think i can highlight a few points.

Waste: I have witnessed alot of Waste in the NHS and there are staggering levels of Beaurchocracy that you do not get in an equivalent private company.

However, the levels of waste i see are not much more than other Government departments (that have been privatised) such as IND, HMRC, F&C, UKPA or even BT.

Badly delivered IT projects are mainly down to poor management as IT projects are driven for political reasons rather than technical reasons.

I could go into more detail, but there are alot of Journalists on this messageboard so you will have to take my word for it.

If truth be told, the main problem with the NHS wasting money is due to senior management and politicians changing their mind on an almost daily basis and chopping and changing budgets on a whim. Hence why there are so many middle managers needed to implement it.

I think the NHS is great, but you got to blame the government for allowing numerous private companies to use it as a cash cow.

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Re:\ "I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done\ "

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 07-07-2008 12:05

Stumpy - you keep talking about outcomes and shit like that as if there are some magic stats which prove the case, but we've yet to see them.

There are plenty of stats, none of them magic. For instance you can go to Eurostat and see that the UK is near the bottom of EU countries for cancer survival rates and trailing behind comparable countries on mortality for respiratory disease and heart disease. In France, for example, you're twice as likely to survive lung cancer than in the UK.

What mechanisms do you measure a health system by?

Things like mortality rates, waiting times, incidence of hospital acquired infections, surgery volumes, patient outcomes,

that kind of thing.

If you prefer to rely on anecdotes (which I personally don't), then I've yet to meet a western European who thinks the NHS is a superior system.

It was, and remains, a huge victory for Our Side, and there haven't been enough of those that we can afford to take that one for granted.

Well, it was, but it doesn't mean it's an ideal model of universal healthcare. I think you'll find other socialist countries in the EU who didn't copy this model and have better health systems, on both objective and subjective criteria.

Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by E10 Rifle - 07-07-2008 12:08

You could argue that a lot of those problems are down to the NHS's principles being undermined (which they have in the past 20 years, massively) rather than enacted

Re:

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 07-07-2008 12:15

E10 Rifle wrote:

I'd be intrigued as to how an insurance-based "choice" system would make this less bureaucratic

I'm not sure I understand how the NHS is run, or what you mean specifically by "insurance-based" here, E10, but in Canada, the state (that is, each province) in effect is the insurer for every single citizen. Usually they pay for this out of general taxation - in a couple of cases there are some premiums that you pay with your taxes (in Ontario, if you earn over about \$100,000/year, for instance). With that, you get a health card. With that health card, you can get most medical services completely free, on demand. There's really very little bureaucracy involved. I go to a doctor, the doctor treats me, and gets paid by the state according to the work performed. Doctors can organize themselves into any kind of clinic arrangement and get paid by the state on a fee-for-service basis.

Would this meet your definition?

Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 07-07-2008 13:18

You could argue that a lot of those problems are down to the NHS's principles being undermined (which they have in the past 20 years, massively) rather than enacted

E10 - it's pretty clear that your arguments for the NHS are based more on ideology and less on whether it's providing acceptable standards of healthcare.

If you believe that all of the problems I've listed are essentially the fault of politicians, then you need to suggest an alternative model that doesn't involve them.

Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by E10 Rifle - 07-07-2008 13:51

Or electing better politicians.

It's clear the NHS requires better management and for standards to improve - I don't think anyone here's questioned that. But if "politicians" are removed from managing the health service, to whom should that responsibility fall, and to

whom would they be accountable?

I'm sorry if making such points makes me guilty of the clearly heinous modern crime of being "ideological", but there you go.

Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by E10 Rifle - 07-07-2008 14:03

Antonio, that sounds like a decent enough system, though can I ask, out of ignorance, a question about this:

Doctors can organize themselves into any kind of clinic arrangement and get paid by the state on a fee-for-service basis.

Does that mean that health staff pay rates and the like vary a lot? And does that also potentially make what the state is paying out more costly and harder to manage than a less marketised system? (Genuine questions BTW, just that there's certainly evidence here that internal markets, when introduced in areas like health, are pretty inefficient)

Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by TonTon - 07-07-2008 14:04

Remember, E10, it's only lefties that have ideology. Market-based solutions rely purely on common sense.

Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 07-07-2008 14:09

I'm not arguing for a market-based solution. I'm saying that the organisation that buys healthcare for you shouldn't be the same organisation that provides it. Like most other countries in Europe.

Re:

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 07-07-2008 14:14

E10 Rifle wrote:

Does that mean that health staff pay rates and the like vary a lot? And does that also potentially make what the state is paying out more costly and harder to manage than a less marketised system?

The variation in doctor's pay varies from specialty to specialty. The Government, with input from health providers) sets a standard scale of payments for each type of service. Surgeons make more than GPs - how much more depends in part on how many surgeries they feel like doing. Anaesthesiologists are so stupidly well-paid that most of them only work 6 months a year.

Nurses - well, nurses tend not to work in clinics, only in hospitals. They're unionized and within each province their hourly rates don't vary much.

I think where pay tends to vary is among people like lab techs and office assistants. What an admin assistant would be paid in a clinic is (I suspect) quite a bit less than what they'd be paid in a hospital. On ancillary services like laundry and food, there are persistent battles (though less so now than when the country was really skint fifteen years ago) about whether these should be contracted out to other agencies. For the most part they are not - not food, anyway (there was an experiment in Manitoba that really didn't go too well).

Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done

Posted by E10 Rifle - 07-07-2008 14:27

I'm saying that the organisation that buys healthcare for you shouldn't be the same organisation that provides it.

That sounds a bit like a market-based solution to me to be honest. And anyway, we've had a purchaser-provider split in the NHS for the past 15-odd years, and increasing marketisation, with PFI and commissioning/provision from private sector sources. Are you sure that the things you want aren't already in fact the cause of the problems you cite?

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Mr Beast - 07-07-2008 14:35

Problems in the NHS have multiplied once bringing in a new level of NHS Trust bureaucracy got their noses in the trough.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 07-07-2008 14:46

No, because the internal market was introduced without any structural reform. So it's essentially an accounting exercise.

And let's be fair to Labour – waiting times have come down since they came in. But, with a health budget finally approaching the European average, we still have waiting lists.

But quoting you from the previous page:

It's clear the NHS requires better management and for standards to improve - I don't think anyone here's questioned that. But if "politicians" are removed from managing the health service, to whom should that responsibility fall, and to whom would they be accountable?

Therein lies the problem. If a chief executive wants to hire better managers – many of which will be in the private sector – he can't do it, because someone like you would also advocate national pay scales. Neither does he have the freedom to manage all of his budget. He might be providing operations cheaper than a hospital down the road, with better clinical outcomes, but there are few incentives to do that either. Plus there's the Department of Health, the NHS trust and the primary care trust sticking their noses in.

I'm not advocating no political involvement in health, but why should civil servants and politicians be managing hospitals and primary care? And why do other socialists in Europe have no ideological objections to a mixture of healthcare provision and funding, but you do?

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by TonTon - 07-07-2008 14:57

Of course the idea that better managers will make the difference, will be found in the private sector, and will need to be paid more - all that is common sense, and nothing whatsoever to do with any kind of ideology, no siree bob.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 07-07-2008 15:00

But would you scrap national pay scales so that they could be hired?

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by TonTon - 07-07-2008 15:31

No

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 07-07-2008 15:46

So how do you square that circle?

If it costs more money to tempt good managers out of the private sector than the national pay scale allows you to pay them, how do you increase the overall quality of management?

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by TonTon - 07-07-2008 15:54

Sorry, Stumpy, did you think I was being straightforward rather than sarky? Apologies if so.

I don't subscribe to your better management ideology.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 07-07-2008 15:56

Is it a trick question? I mean, the obvious answer seems to be "increase the national pay scale", but I may be missing something.

(It certainly seems a less hard problem than squaring the circle, which is impossible.)

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 07-07-2008 15:57

What TonTon said, as well. The idea that the "private sector" is brim-full of "good managers" whose "skills" are "transferable" into a completely unrelated field that runs on a public service ethos--well, show me some evidence that any of that is the case.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Alessandro Nesta Marley - 07-07-2008 16:07

Word. Also, when senior management types from the private sector have been recruited on top whack to manage public services, they've been known to bring along a fair bit of 'ideology' themselves. Dare one say, that's probably why successive governments have been so keen to recruit them in the first place.

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Re:"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done"

Posted by Stumpy Pepys - 07-07-2008 16:26

So if current managers aren't up to the job and private sector managers aren't up to the job, how do you suggest management is improved across the NHS?

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Re:\\"I like to think what Nye Bevan would have done\"

Posted by Alessandro Nesta Marley - 07-07-2008 16:33

Personally I wouldn't presume to say that either current managers or hypothetical future ones aren't up to the job. What's important is the nature of the job, and whether the politicians who set the terms of the job are up to the, er, are up to scratch.

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