

## Sector Profile

Overwhelmingly health workers are employed in the NHS, which was established in 1948 and is now the largest employer organisation in Europe. There are over 1.3 million people employed by the NHS in the UK, and 80% of these are front line staff. There are over 300 different careers within the NHS, with an extremely diverse mix of skills and specialisms.

Under the 2004 Comprehensive Spending Review the Government will have invested £92 billion in the NHS by 2007/8 – a predicted 9.5% of GDP and putting the UK at the same level as France and Germany

## Trade Unions

Amicus is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest trade union in the NHS, representing almost 100,000 health sector workers working in primary, secondary and mental health care. The National Officer is **Kevin Coyne**.

Within Amicus Health there are seven professional groups:

- Medical Practitioners' Union (MPU)
- Society of Sexual Health Advisers (SSHA)
- Hospital Physicists' Association (HPA)
- College of Health Care Chaplains (CHCC)
- Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists (GHP)
- Mental Health Nurses Association, (MHNA)
- Community Practitioners and Health Visitors' Association, (CPHVA).

There are also Occupational Advisory Groups (OACs) for allied health professions, health care science, nursing, family of psychology, counsellors & psychotherapists, independent practitioners, the family of dental professions, audiology professions, optometrists and opticians, maintenance and estates..

There are 14 unions recognised within the NHS, representing the full breadth of professions.

## Employers

Although the majority working within the UK health sector are directly employed by the NHS some particular professions do vary from this – for example, where services exist commercially as well - and GPs are 'contractors' with the NHS rather than directly employed.

There has been a small but significant growth in the private health sector following the ongoing implementation of policies to contract private companies for some services. The use of PFIs to carry out re-development and construction of premises very often leads to maintenance and estates workers being transferred to the private sector. In addition, Independent Sector Treatment Centres (ISTCs) are providing services using some seconded NHS staff.

## Current Issues and Activities

- Recent NHS reforms have been underpinned by a process of transferring assets and services to the private sector, with this agenda becoming more aggressive. Primary Care Trusts are being encouraged to 'commission' other organisations to provide health services rather than providing them themselves. This is likely to lead to a large number of services being handed to the private sector.
- The creation of a financial crisis by using inappropriate financial mechanisms and measures has led to widespread service cuts, post deletions and vacancy freezes. The deficit figure of £500 million is 1% of the total NHS budget. Financial resources have also been diverted to the private sector, e.g. through PFI contracts and the use of ISTCs for some elective surgery and diagnostics.
- Some services have been disproportionately hit by cuts, being seen as 'soft targets', such as mental health and health visitor services, and staff education and training budgets also being severely cut.
- The initial implementation of Agenda for Change – the new pay structure introduced to combat unequal pay – is nearly complete in England, with Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in the earlier stages of implementation. Amicus will continue to work with members to ensure that AfC continues to be implemented fairly and properly.
- A two-tier workforce still exists in hard facilities management, despite Government pledges in the Warwick agreement.
- The health sector is part of Amicus *Valuing Public Services* campaign, and is fully involved in *NHS Together* – the unprecedented coming together of all health sector unions - and supports *Keep Our NHS Public* to build the broadest possible alliance to defend a publicly funded and provided NHS.