

The NHS

The important principle that people like and support is that healthcare should be free. We should all have free access to the NHS, and should expect to receive timely and good quality treatment in proportion to our health needs.

The only major departure from this was when Labour in the early years of the NHS introduced charges for prescriptions and glasses. Subsequent governments of various parties have given more exemptions to prescription charges whilst continuing with them and from time to time increasing them.

The NHS has never been a fully nationalised service. Labour's original establishment allowed GPs to be private contractors, running their services from private premises as many still do today. The NHS has always relied on the private sector to supply its drugs, bandages, food and other supplies. For many years under governments of all three parties the NHS has employed private company contractors in various locations to clean and cook, to provide a range of services to hospitals and surgeries.

Nor has the NHS ever insisted on all its supplies coming from the UK. Where foreign companies have developed good drugs that UK manufacturers do not have the NHS is willing to import them. The NHS is also cost conscious and usually negotiates a bulk discount or special terms reflecting its buying power.

Most people do not mind the NHS drawing on the best supplies from the private sector as part of its activity, as long as the core proposition of free good quality NHS care is maintained. The present government has no intention of deviating from this. These are common principles and practices shared by Labour and Conservative governments in office.