

Notes of first BADACA health group meeting 18th January 2011

Attendance

The meeting was well-attended - Nigel Varley introduced Bristol Anti-Cuts Alliance (BADACA) and a cross-section of health workers: from the community and from the acute sector; nurses, porters, a researcher who has done reports from UNISON, clerical and technical staff; retired, on permanent contract or on the bank; union members from UNITE, UNSION and RCN. BADACA and other campaigns.

Nigel explained about BADACA which had organised a local demonstration on 23rd October and was battling with the council to agree the route for a future demonstration on 19th February. This health group would send a delegate to the BADACA committee which would take an overview of the activities of different anti-cuts groups for sectors and localities. BADACA was setting up pages on Facebook and email accounts to aid communication and co-ordination between those organising to oppose the cuts.

There was mention of national initiatives to oppose privatisation and cuts in the health service. Keep Our NHS Public has been going some years, has held public meetings in Bristol, has a local email list and would be organising a response in London the next day to the Health Bill. 38-Degrees encourages local groups of people opposed to cuts to meet and to participate in local demonstrations and two Sunday afternoon meetings had been organised in Bristol for those interested in health. A BADACA health group could propose activities and keep in touch with all such groups.

What is happening in the health service

People shared an overview of the situation as it impinged on them. From University Hospitals Bristol there was news of imposed shift patterns, downgrading and no-replacement of staff when people leave. It was suggested that downgrading of staff is systematic. In the other large acute Trust (North Bristol) you can meet nurses who have been redeployed more than once as wards are closed and merged. A national scheme ('MARS') is being used to thin out jobs - staff can apply to leave for a severance payment (worth less than redundancy would be). In the Mental Health Trust (AWP) there is downgrading of community nurses from grade 6 to 5. As the Trust aims for Foundation status there is a plan for a huge cut of in-patient beds. A bank nurse is working for a service that is due to be cut and felt it would be useful to make links with other bank nurses and their experiences. Primary Care Trust staff know their whole organisation is due to disappear.

Looking wider at the strategic plan for the health service, it can be seen that the NHS service is being run down as the private sector is built up. The Independent Sector Treatment Centres (for example at Emersons Green) get paid (by the NHS) 110% of the NHS tariff for each patient treated. Yet they screen their patients and will not take on anything with the hint of a complication. Hence, for example they are 'creaming off' the straightforward hip and knee replacements. No wonder the NHS looks more inefficient as it struggles to do all the more difficult orthopaedic cases.

As cuts are made there is fear that in some cases senior medical staff jostle to defend their own position only. The 'partnership arrangements' of our Joint Union Committees can mean senior union reps become enrolled in helping management push through money-saving re-organisation. Another problem is fear of discipline for individuals putting out information in the public domain. On the other hand, there is renewed vigour in our unions. The RCN has joined with UNISON and UNITE to reject the idea of agreeing to lose our annual pay increments for a promise of no redundancies for staff on the lower grades.

Proposals for Organisation and Action

Convenors for the group – who would take the names of those involved and make sure they got group information and in future represent the health group at the BADACA Committee (together with reps from other sector and area anti-cuts groups). Two convenors were elected who would take a list of names and circulate for the next meeting. It was suggested that there might be a further convenor from the community sector at a future date.

Getting out information Two members agreed to work on this. Nigel commended the format of news sheet produced by South Gloucestershire NUT which clarified news with a description of how cuts would affect schools.

Saturday 26th March – Trade Union Congress (TUC) rally in London against the cuts. All unions will be sending transport. A big turnout will be a confidence boost. Several people ticked the sign up sheet to say they wanted transport to this march. There was a poster which many took away.

Public Meeting It might be good if we could organise this for the run-up to the 26th March demonstration. It was mentioned that there were local academics with knowledge of the effects of the cuts who could be approached.

Industrial Action

The Bristol Health Service UNITE branch had passed a resolution supporting the rally on 26th March and calling on the TUC to organise a 24hour General Strike as a springboard to further joint union action. There may come a point when public sector workers feel more harm is being done by cuts than any industrial action.

Financial Support to this group

Bristol Health Service UNITE had agreed to fund a future meeting venue for the BADACA health group to the tune of £100. An individual has promised to pay the £35 fee for a meeting in Horfield Community Centre

NEXT MEETING

An organising meeting on Tuesday 8th February

(5.30 at the same venue, Robin Hood, was agreed but NOTE we immediately found venue was not available after 6pm on a Tuesday so venue will be confirmed once sorted by convenors)