

Debate re release of Risk Register for Health Bill

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The curious thing, as I know my hon. Friend will appreciate, is that even the Leader of the Opposition says that reform is needed in the NHS because of the challenges that it faces. Of course we can debate what the nature of the reform should be, but the idea that we can simply stand still and that nothing in the NHS needs to change is not the view of NHS staff, patients, the Labour party or the Government. We therefore have to consider what the nature of that reform needs to be, and I believe in patient choice and empowering doctors and nurses on the front line to deliver care. I believe in cutting bureaucracy and removing whole tiers of management to enable that to happen, and in common with my Liberal Democrat friends and colleagues I believe in strengthening democratic local accountability in the NHS and strengthening public health services through local government operations.

The worst possible thing for me to do would be to say, "We need to reform the NHS because it is doing so badly." I do not believe that, but I do believe we have to root out poor performance. I was shocked to hear the shadow Secretary of State and Mr Bradshaw, who has disappeared, talking about Stafford hospital. They were the ones who never appreciated the risk of what was happening there. They know that they went through reorganisations without ever addressing the risk. The dreadful things there happened on their watch, so they might at the very least have come here and apologised. The right hon. Member for Exeter came to the Dispatch Box when he was a Minister and said, "Oh, it's nothing to do with me, it's all to do with the management of the hospital."

I believe in foundation trust hospitals, which apparently the Labour party now does not. [*Interruption.*] The shadow Secretary of State is trying to have it both ways. He is trying to say that he is in favour of foundation trust hospitals, but that if they get into difficulties the best thing is for them to be run by the Secretary of State. He might talk to Alan Johnson, who was the Secretary of State when, in the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust, dozens, perhaps hundreds of patients died of clostridium difficile infection at the Kent and Sussex hospital. That was an NHS trust, not a foundation trust. The Department of Health and the Secretary of State have no God-given ability to run hospitals directly and do so better than they can be run by the doctors, nurses and managers in charge. The point is that there must be proper accountability, and through HealthWatch, local government and the responsibilities of Monitor we will have a proper accountability structure in the Bill.

