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£1.5 Billion Up For Grabs

Private companies are well placed to grab contracts for clinical services worth £1.5 billion which have been advertised since the start of the NHS's new commissioning regime in April. The total has been worked out by the campaign group NHS Support Federation whose researchers have been monitoring contracts notified under the EU's procurement rules. The researchers have observed a surge of contracts being advertised recently – around double those advertised at the same time a year ago.

The researchers predict that almost all the contracts will go to the private sector. Of 16 contracts awarded from 1 April to 3 July, only two went to NHS organisations.

Contracts advertised on the European Union and NHS websites would normally be worth more than £100,000. The biggest contract listed is for £800 million for running community services in Cambridgeshire. Bidding for this lucrative deal has not yet began.

The Cambridgeshire contract comfortably tops similar deals for community services already done and dusted in Suffolk (£130 million for Serco) and Surrey (£500 million for Virgin).

The NHS Support Federation found a growing range of clinical services were being advertised for bidders, but coming up most frequently were contracts for GP out-of-hours-services, diagnostics, mental health and domiciliary (home visit) services.

A separate piece of research by the NHS Support Federation also highlights the quickening pace of privatisation in the NHS in England. The federation says that one tenth of GP facilities, including health centres and walk-in clinics, will be run by a private company by next year.

The Federation has tallied the companies who will be running GP facilities: 358 Virgin, 52 The Practice Plc, 34 Malling Health, 26 Care UK, 23 Intrahealth, 23 SSP Health, 12 Integral HP, 11 AP Medics, 10 NH Solutions, 9 Go To Doc.

Meanwhile lovers of former Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney will be delighted to hear that the firm he used to lead, Bain Capital, is to pay a bargain-basement £200 million for an 80% stake in Plasma Resources, the government-owned company supplying plasma to the NHS. The rest of us will be feeling a little sick.