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Public Turns Against Private Providers

Public opposition to private providers in the NHS has increased sharply over the last three years, according to poll findings from Ipsos Mori.

Back in February 2011 only 36 per cent of people polled thought it mattered if NHS services were privately provided as long as they were free. But when the poll was re-run last October, 47% took that view.

In the same period, agreement with the use of private providers in the NHS rose by just 1% from 41% to 42%, placing the “private is OK” view in a minority.

When people were questioned about not-for-profit providers the balance changed, with 54% taking a favourable view.

The two polls span a period of growing awareness of NHS privatisation during the passage through Parliament of the Health and Social Care Act, and its implementation last April.

The latest poll was carried out as part of a “History & Policy” project being run from King’s College, London and Cambridge University. Shockingly, the promoters of the poll did not try to hide their disappointment with the findings.

A press release from Ipsos Mori and History & Policy quotes Dr Nick Hayes of Nottingham Trent University saying: “People imagine a negative past that never really existed when it come to pre-1948 healthcare. This mythical past shapes contemporary attitudes to changes in the NHS. It makes public and policymakers alike cautious. Those who oppose change know this and they play upon people’s fears.”

Dr Hayes’ partisan version of healthcare history is at odds with the fact that the Conservatives ditched their opposition to the NHS just two years after the free national service was established because the service was so popular. The wide backing for the NHS in those early years came from people who, unlike Dr Hayes, had experienced the previous patchy provision.