

Integrated Care Regulations

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons), Chair, Liaison Committee

As my Committee has already been quoted, I think that it might assist the House if I were also to quote from the conclusions that we came to on this issue. The Committee said:

"We recognise the concern expressed by those who worry that ACOs could be taken over by private companies managing a very large budget, but we heard a clear message that this is unlikely to happen in practice. Rather than leading to increasing privatisation and charges for healthcare, we heard that using an ACO contract to form large integrated care organisations would be more likely to lead to less competition and a diminution of the internal market and private sector involvement."

Jon Ashworth Shadow Secretary of State for Health

The hon. Lady makes an interesting point. She is correct in as much as there is not currently a long queue of companies lining up to take control of whole health systems, but that could change if some new form of Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership is brought in by a post-Brexit deal. A number of these companies are becoming increasingly litigious in the courts, which is why Virgin Care took the NHS in Surrey to court. However, even if a private provider is not gifted a whole contract, which is the point that the hon. Lady is making, there is nothing to prevent it from buddying up with NHS bodies in joint ventures as a way of exercising influence over the way in which local health systems are configured. There is already evidence of private sector involvement in the establishment of the integrated care system, with Centene UK—an offshoot of an American health insurer—working with Capita in the Nottingham ICS.

.....

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons), Chair, Liaison Committee

Will the Minister assure the House that only public statutory providers will hold these contracts? That would be reassuring, as the language on this is not completely clear. Will he also give some assurance regarding the Select Committee's other proposal, which is that the policy should be carefully piloted and evaluated? If it is done first in Dudley, followed by careful evaluation, I would be prepared to support it. If he cannot give reassurance on those points, it would be difficult for me to support the regulations.

Stephen Hammond Minister of State (Department of Health and Social Care)

I can give the Chair of the Select Committee the assurance that the ICP contract will be made available in a controlled and incremental way, conditional on the successful completion of NHS England and NHS Improvement assurance through the integrated support and assurance process. That incremental process is, I think, in line with what she and her Committee recommended.