



Jennette Arnold OBE, AM
Hackney, Islington & Waltham Forest

City Hall
Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA
Switchboard: 020 7983 4000
Minicom: 020 7983 4458
Web: www.london.gov.uk

Jeremy Hunt
Secretary of State

Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London SW1A 2NS

21st February 2013 JA/AM

Dear Secretary of State

RE: Whittington Hospital Estates Strategy

We understand that the Board of Whittington Hospital in their new Estates Strategy have agreed to sell off a considerable portion of its land and buildings - up to half the hospital's site - to raise £17 million to reconfigure its healthcare delivery and support its application to achieve foundation trust status.

As you will be aware, these plans have caused concern amongst residents that rely on the hospital, which has a catchment area that includes three London boroughs; Islington, Haringey and Camden.

Birth cap

We are concerned about a cap being implemented on the number of births at the Whittington at 4,000 per annum. We understand there were 3,900 births at the Whittington in 2012 but as the population rises and as other hospitals across London are losing their maternity units or having them downgraded, we believe capacity needs to be increased rather than reduced in the existing units. The proposed upgrade to the Whittington's maternity unit is welcomed, but selling off assets to pay for this seems short-sighted. Imposing a cap would surely create additional unnecessary anxiety to expectant mothers living locally.

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Loss of beds

We understand elderly care beds are currently at 95% capacity and question the practicality therefore of halving the number of inpatient beds, especially as London's population is ageing and older patients typically require more time in hospital following admission.

Job losses

We are alarmed at the prospect of the Whittington cutting 570 jobs, including 200 nurses. With the loss of such a high number of staff, how can the Whittington guarantee that the level of service currently provided will not be jeopardised?

Foundation trust status

We understand the Whittington wishes to save £4.8 million by March 2013 in order to support its application to achieve foundation trust status and appreciate there is pressure on hospitals to achieve this by 2014. However, the timing of the plan's release, within a few days of the Francis report cannot but increase anxieties regarding the focus of the trust's goals. Mid Staffs made deep cuts in order to achieve foundation trust status with appalling consequences. We are not prepared to stand by and see a similar story unfold at the Whittington Hospital.

We also wonder if the hospital reduces in size, will this undermine its prospects as a foundation trust, and cause it to be required to merge with another hospital?

We would appreciate sight of the trust's foundation trust application and Monitor's initial response to this before any damaging and potentially irreversible harm is done.

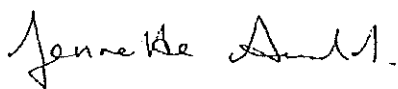
Secretive nature of the plans

Along with the local MPs, we are very disappointed at the way the plans have been drawn up and released by the Board. We believe that the Board should be clear and honest with their plans and would welcome an opportunity to discuss our concerns about these plans with the Board.

You will also be aware that this is not the first time there has been a campaign to save services at Whittington Hospital. A successful campaign began in 2009 and resulted in the secure future of the hospital. After this, the secretive nature of these plans feels even more of a betrayal to the residents affected.

Ultimately, the biggest question is whether the hospital can continue to provide the excellent service that it currently does with half of the services? We therefore urge you to look into the case of Whittington hospital and intervene to ensure that this hospital keeps its excellent services.

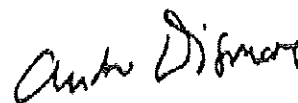
Yours sincerely



Jennette Arnold, OBE, AM
London Assembly Member for
North East London (Hackney,
Islington and Waltham Forest)



Joanne McCartney AM
London Assembly Member for
Enfield and Haringey



Andrew Dismore AM
London Assembly Member
for Barnet and Camden