

# The role of the independent sector in the NHS: Busting the myths

## Myth:

Large parts of the NHS are being privatised.

## Reality:

Since universal healthcare was established in 1948, a range of non-publicly owned care providers – including the independent sector, charities, social enterprises and mutuals – have supported the NHS in the delivery of free at the point of use services for patients. Currently **7.6% of NHS spending goes to the independent sector\*** (compared with 6% in 2013) which is money spent on NHS patients to support the NHS, including additional elective capacity, diagnostics technology and community health provision.<sup>1</sup>



\*this does not include other non-publicly owned organisations such as general practice, community pharmacy and NHS dentistry.

## Myth:

The independent sector is only used by the NHS to cut costs.

## Reality:

The independent sector is used by the NHS to help it meet the increasing challenges it faces by:

- **providing additional capacity** to help meet rising demand – last year over 500,000 NHS patients were treated by independent providers, helping reduce waiting times for patients
- **investing capital** so more procedures can be carried out without the need for the NHS to build more hospitals
- **spreading innovation**, eg the latest diagnostics technology to improve patient care.



## Myth:

The NHS is putting everything out to tender.

## Reality:

Current rules state that no one can pursue competition in the NHS if it is not in the interests of patients.<sup>2</sup> **Any tendering of services must be open and transparent** for the public to understand. A British Medical Journal study indicated that 5.5% of contracts were subject to a competitive tender since April 2013.



## NHS Confederation view:

Throughout its history the health service has relied on independent and voluntary organisations both to provide care directly and to support it in a host of other ways. GPs, for example have always predominantly been independent contractors. It is not the type of organisation that is important, it is the **quality of care** and the **value for money** it offers. The public and those who use services have consistently made clear that this is what matters to them and there are countless examples of outstanding innovation and high quality care from public, independent and voluntary organisations.

## Myth:

The public think that care should only be provided by NHS providers.

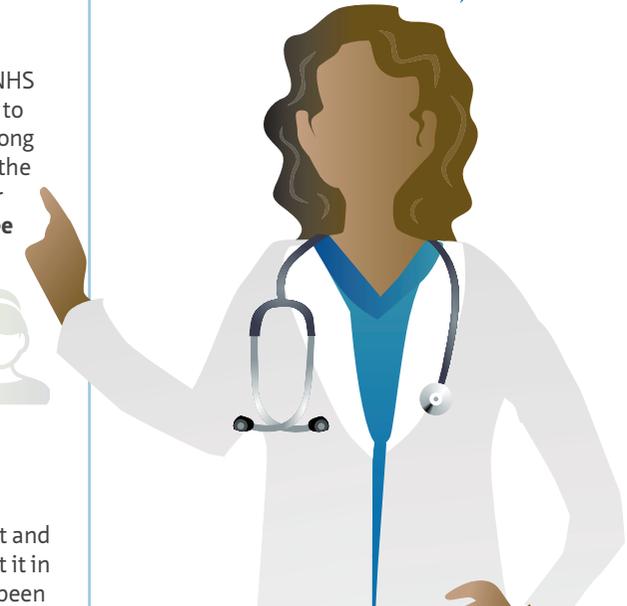
## Reality:

79% of people agree with the NHS using the independent sector to provide services to patients as long as they meet NHS standards, the cost to the NHS is the same or lower, and **services remain free at the point of use.**<sup>3</sup>



Myths

Reality



[www.nhsconfed.org](http://www.nhsconfed.org)  
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1 Department of Health Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16, July 2016

2 Substantive guidance on the Procurement, Patient Choice and Competition Regulations, Monitor, Dec 2013

3 The people, the parties and the NHS, Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC, January 2015