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## Targets – Missing the Point?

Health Secretary Andrew Lansley is ending the 'target culture in the NHS.

*nhsManagers.net* polling makes managers' opinion clear, 'it's like throwing the baby out with the bath water'. What do clinicians think? According to Andrew Lansley, they are opposed to targets. Well, here's one doctor who is not. Revise them, he says, don't dump them

**Every worker who wants to improve the service a team provides needs targets to provide both challenge and reward. The targets must be concrete, realistic, appropriately prioritised and set in context.**

Without targets teams may be unclear how to organise and prioritise their work and become demotivated by a loss of sense of struggle, inventiveness and achievement.

Targets must be well thought out and subject to review. For example the 4 hours target in A&E was interpreted by managers in many Trusts as "Get the patient into any bed", rather than "Assess the patient early and thoroughly, start treatments and direct to an appropriate clinical team within 4 hours".

The context must also be considered with appropriate leeway for missing the target. So during a flu epidemic the 4 hours target might be allowed to slip. The targets must be described so that it is clear that timely appropriate and safe clinical care is the highest priority.

In our Acute Medical Unit our self set target is "Door of AMU to doctor in 30 minutes", and set in the context of

- Right diagnosis
- Right treatment
- Right time
- Right place
- Right to no avoidable harm and
- Better next time

The Coalition Government has stated that it will reduce target setting. This leaves the risk that we will be encouraged to meet some vague indicators such as "Work hard, safely, carefully and to high standards".

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philosophy of targets, and it would be better to revise rather than abandon targets in the NHS.

When targets were introduced there were impressive falls in A&E and outpatient waiting times.

Some of the many targets were poorly thought out, and should have been revised.

There is risk in abandoning the

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