



Andrew Craig is a partner in the Moore Adamson Craig Partnership LLP, a specialist user involvement consultancy, and a PEC Member for NHS Wandsworth. His views are his own.

andrew@agcraig.com

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Let the Shroud Waving Begin

The starting pistol fires, the pundits yell “And they’re off!” Let the shroud waving begin! Elections cause perfectly reasonable people to behave irrationally about NHS changes. People who understand that in too many places we have the wrong services being delivered to the wrong populations in the wrong settings and who accept that decommissioning and reinvestment make sense, become seized with a “thou shall not change anything” fervour.

Years ago I stood on a public platform somewhere west of Wimbledon trying to explain the logic for rationalising the number of casualty departments and acute beds in the sector (good luck to those trying to do the same again now) when an A&E consultant got up and shouted proprietorially “people will die if you close our A&E”.

His unfurled shroud instantly turned the room fractious. The health authority CEO and I knew we’d lost the persuasion battle. In time, of course, that casualty unit in a crumbling building made way for a new community hospital and walk in centre, soon to be the hub of a poly-system offering a much better mix of services. People didn’t die.

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Spare us another “War of Jennifer’s Ear” about demand management. Everyone loses and public confidence nose dives. Beware the siren song of underemployed surgeons blaming everything on McKinseys. Let commissioners be accountable for evidence-based planned differences reflecting health needs of their populations. Everything for everyone everywhere all of the time cannot be value for money. There is the small matter of saving £20bn and reducing overheads by 30%. We can’t do this without clinical engagement and leadership of service transformation from GPs, the most trusted part of the NHS.

Please keep “Save our [fill in the blank]” placards out of the hands of candidates. Just remember to duck the flying pigs.