

## Hands off our NHS



Hello listeners, welcome once again. This is me Mat Clark. And this week we're talking about the UK's free health service, the National Health Service, or as we call it in the UK, the NHS.

As we all know, Donald Trump visited the UK last week, and he made a lot of people angry. Well, he made a lot of people angry just by visiting the UK. But then he made even more people even angrier by mentioning the NHS. That's all he did. He just mentioned it. And people were furious.

Let's find out why. Let's find out more about the NHS and let's find out why no one is allowed to touch the NHS.

So the title of this week's article is "Hands off our NHS". **Hands off**, this is a warning. It means do not touch something. We use it as a warning in speaking. It's very informal. It's very direct. And it's actually short for "take your hands off something" or "get your hands off something".

➤ Hands off my chocolate.

If I see you touching my chocolate, I will warn you, "Hey, hands off my chocolate. Don't touch my chocolate."

➤ Hands off my computer.

Don't touch my computer.

So the title is saying, "Don't touch the NHS." It's a warning to Trump and America.

So the article begins by saying British politicians don't find much to agree on these days. As we know from previous episodes, British politics is in a bit of a mess at the moment - British politicians cannot agree on Brexit. So they are not really in harmony. They don't find much to agree on these days.

And that's an expression we can use: **don't find much to agree on these days**. And it means constantly arguing about many things.

➤ The two countries, India and Pakistan, don't find much to agree on these days.

They are constantly arguing about many different things.

➤ The couple don't find much to agree on these days. I think they will break up soon.

They are constantly arguing about many different things.

The article then tells us but mention the National Health Service, as President Donald Trump did last Tuesday, and the country unites in one voice: Hands off our NHS. It repeats the title.

So this is one thing all politicians and all British people agree about. They are united, they are joined together by their shared, their unified opinion. And their shared opinion is "Do not touch the NHS."

The article then tells us that Britain's healthcare system is free at the point of delivery for everyone in the UK and has been since after the end of World War Two.

Now this expression, **free at the point of delivery**, is a little bit difficult to explain. It means that you don't have to pay anything to the doctors or hospitals at the moment that you receive the service. But really, we can say that the NHS is not totally free, because all British citizens pay tax. And quite a lot of this tax is used to pay for the NHS. So technically, the NHS isn't free. But at the moment you receive the health service, either in the doctor's surgery or in the hospital, you don't pay any money.

So free at the point of delivery meaning at the moment you receive the service, there is no charge. More about this later.

The article then tells us that over the years, it has become a cherished national institution, immune from criticism. Whenever governments plan to introduce charges, or if they suggest some private investment, making some parts of the service private, as in you would pay a private company to give you the health treatment or service, this inevitably causes an uproar.

So first of all, **over the years**, meaning over a long period of time.

- The city has changed a lot over the years.
- The value of the house has increased a lot over the years.
- The city hasn't changed much over the years.
- The value of the house hasn't increased much over the years.

So over a long period of time since 1948 when it was created, the NHS has become a cherished national institution. If something is **cherished**, it is loved. Everybody loves it. A **national institution** is an important tradition or custom that has existed for a long time in a particular country. And it's very, very important to the people in that country.

- Fish and chips became a national institution in Britain in the 20th century.

So the NHS is something more than just a healthcare system. British people see the NHS as being a very special part of our society, which is why we get very angry when someone talks about changing it.

The article also says that the NHS is immune from criticism. In this sentence, **immune** means protected from or not affected by something. So the British people see the NHS as being immune from criticism, protected from any critical or negative comments. So we see the NHS as something which cannot be criticised.

The article says that whenever governments plan to introduce charges, or make changes, it inevitably causes an uproar. So in the past, when governments have even mentioned, maybe we need to introduce a payment system, or maybe we could make some areas of the NHS private, it inevitably causes an uproar.

So inevitably, obviously, not surprisingly, causes an uproar. An **uproar** is a situation in which a lot of people complain very angrily about something.

- His new book has caused an uproar in some countries.
- The new law has caused an uproar.
- The flight was canceled and this caused an uproar in the airport.

So whenever anyone even a British Prime Minister mentions making any changes to the NHS, a lot of people complain very angrily. So of course, when an American politician mentioned making changes to the NHS, the British people became absolutely furious.

The article then tells us about the trouble, the pressure on the NHS. The problem is, there are many pressures on the NHS. The article tells us that we now have more old people, an aging population - more people who are living much, much longer, which means we need more healthcare.

It also tells us that many treatments are expensive. For example, medical technology in surgery has improved a lot. We have very, very, very sophisticated medical technology in hospitals, which can be used to treat many, many serious health problems. But all of these services are very expensive. And there is more and more demand for these very, very expensive services. It costs a lot of money. Very, very difficult surgery, and very, very difficult operations can now be done, but this needs to be paid for.

It also tells us that there is a public spending squeeze. The government is spending less on public services generally. Now here is the difficult sentence. This situation gives politicians little room for manoeuvre.

Now, if you **have room for manoeuvre**, you have the chance to change something. You can try to do something in a different way. You can try to do things in a different way to get better results. It's more commonly used in a negative statement to express that someone or maybe a group of people cannot easily change something. They cannot easily do something in a different way.

- The company has little room for manoeuvre because they are restricted by local laws.
- Teachers feel that they have little room for manoeuvre because they have to improve their students' test scores.

So British politicians have little room for manoeuvre, meaning they cannot easily change or try to improve the NHS because of the problems that we just mentioned.

So this means American healthcare companies spot an opening. The NHS needs investment. It needs money. And after Brexit, Britain wants a trade deal with the US. So American healthcare companies, private healthcare companies spot an opening. They can see an opportunity.

The NHS needs money, and the UK doesn't really have the money needed to improve the NHS. After Brexit, the UK will need to get new trade deals, especially with the US. And one way to do this would be to use the NHS in a trade deal.

The UK could say to the US, "OK, we will let you buy some parts of the NHS and run these as private health service or healthcare companies. And in return, you give us a good trade deal in other areas." But of course, the British people have reacted very, very angrily to this idea.

The article tells us that the NHS has become an integral part of British society. It is a very, very, very important part of our society and how we view ourselves as a society.

We are one of the only countries that has a completely free healthcare system. And we were the first country to introduce a free healthcare system. So we see the NHS as really a very, very major achievement in modern British society. Possibly it's the best thing Britain ever did.

So the article tells us that no politician, not even the world's most powerful one, is allowed to tamper with the NHS.

If you **tamper with** something, you touch it, or you make changes to that thing, changes that you should not really make, and often you damage it or you cause it to break. So it's often trying to fix or repair something that you don't really understand, you don't really know how to fix it, and you actually make it worse.

- He tampered with the TV, and now it doesn't work at all.  
So he tried to fix the TV, but he doesn't really know how to fix a TV. And now the TV just doesn't work at all. He's made it worse. He tampered with the TV.
- Don't tamper with the gas cooker. It's quite dangerous. Don't try to fix it. You need to call an expert to fix it.

So no politician, not even Donald Trump, is allowed to tamper with our NHS.

OK, so let's find out a little bit more about the cherished national institution, the British NHS.

As I just mentioned, the NHS was the first universal healthcare system established anywhere in the world in 1948. Even in the very beginning, the NHS

had problems. The biggest problem from the very beginning and still today is simply finding enough money to pay for it.

How much does the NHS cost? Well, in England, not including Scotland, not Wales and not Northern Ireland, just in England, the NHS costs approximately 125 billion pounds per year. And that is not actually enough. Experts agree that we should be spending an extra 20 billion pounds per year just to maintain, just to keep the same level of service.

That's not to improve it. That's not to make changes. If we want to maintain and keep the same level of healthcare, we should be spending another 20 billion pounds per year. But where will we get this money from?

Do we cut spending in education? Of course not. We can't do that. So we need to find that money from somewhere. And the truth is the UK doesn't have that much spare money.

So we often hear about the British government cutting spending on public services. Now they are not doing this because they are mean. They are doing this to try to find money for the NHS.

But not every part of British healthcare is free. We do pay for some. Let me explain.

You go to the doctor, anyone, that is free. Now if you need medicine, the doctor will give you a special form, and you take that to the pharmacy. And of course, in Britain, we don't call it the pharmacy, we call it the chemist. So you go to the chemist and most people, you take the form the doctor gave you, and you take it to the chemist, and then we pay for the medicine that the doctor has recommended.



Most people pay for medicine. But medicine is free for children under 16, people aged 16 to 18 who are still in full-time education, people with low income, people over 65, women who are pregnant, or women who have had a baby in the last 12 months, or people with some serious permanent diseases which require daily medicine such as diabetes.

So these people do not pay for any medicine. But normal working adults on normal salaries pay for medicine. But they only pay nine pounds for each type of medicine. And really this is nothing in terms of income.

Each year, these medicine charges only generate, only create about 500 million pounds per year. Now, as I just mentioned, the NHS costs more than 125 billion pounds per year. Now my maths isn't very good, but even I can see that that is about 0.5 per cent. So through the sale of medicine, the NHS it can make some money, but it's very, very small when we think about the total cost of the NHS.

So what can we do in the future to save our NHS? Well, about 50 per cent of the British population support a tax increase to improve the NHS. So in a recent survey, about 50 per cent of the population said, "Yes, we understand the NHS needs more money. I will happily pay more tax, income tax if you spend that tax on the NHS." 50 per cent.

But that's only 50 per cent of the people. Politically, this is a dangerous topic. The government, any government could charge more tax to increase spending on the NHS. And 50 per cent of the population would be very happy. But what about the 50 per cent who don't support this idea? 50 per cent don't support. That is a lot of voters. So as you can see, politically, this is dangerous. Governments are not keen on increasing tax to pay for the NHS because it's risky. You risk losing many voters.

So that doesn't seem like a reasonable or likely solution, even though I think it's a good idea. So what is the future of the NHS? Well, right now Brexit is the biggest problem facing the NHS. The NHS employs about 1.5 million people, and 160,000 of those people are not British. They are from other European countries.

What happens after Brexit? Will those people leave the UK? Can we still employ them in the NHS? Maybe we can't. These are often skilled medical staff, very, very difficult to replace these people. So that's one problem.

What about medicine? Right now, the UK is part of something called the EMA, the European Medicines Agency. This is where EU countries they share research and they share medicine, and they share knowledge of new medicines. And we sell medicines to each other. So we buy a lot of our medicine from within the EU, and we also sell medicine to other EU countries at very, very low competitive prices. Now, after Brexit, we will leave this group. Not good. Not good for medicine.

So what happens? There's no easy solution for the NHS. Brexit is going to cause many, many problems for the NHS. The NHS doesn't have enough money, and it looks like the British government doesn't have a solution to find more money for the NHS. Maybe the only solution is to listen to Donald Trump.

OK, that brings me to the end of this episode. So as usual, thank you very much for listening, and I will be back next week with another episode. And until then, this is me Mat Clark signing off and saying goodbye. Goodbye.