

LEGISLATION

New Labour's PPI Reforms: Patient *and* Public
Involvement in Healthcare Governance?

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Following a first wave of reform at the beginning of the decade, the system of patient and public involvement in healthcare governance is being further overhauled under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Health and Social Care Act 2008. The current reforms reflect a significant shift in dominant political discourse from an earlier concern with patient *and* public involvement towards a more exclusive focus on consumer choice and economic regulation, with collective voice and citizen participation at best playing a subordinate part in the government's NHS modernisation agenda. While there is some potential for increased responsiveness in the new arrangements, the overall effect is likely to be a weakening of the foundations of democratic decision making in the governance of healthcare in England.

INTRODUCTION

This article presents a critical analysis of the current reform of patient and public involvement (PPI) in healthcare governance in England,¹ under Part 14 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and Part 1 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008.² Public participation initiatives in healthcare are part of a trend in democratic societies towards an increased role for citizens and service-users in public services governance.³ UK initiatives in this field go back at least as far as the formation of Community Health Councils (CHCs) in 1974 and the Patient's Charter of the Major Government,⁴ but have gained

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1 Since devolution there has been significant policy divergence across the UK on PPI. On the contrasting trajectories of English and Welsh NHS reforms generally, see D. Hughes and P. Vincent-Jones, 'Schisms in the Church: NHS Systems and Institutional Divergence in England and Wales' (2008) 49 *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour* 400.

2 Hereafter respectively the 2007 Act and the 2008 Act. Parts of the 2007 Act concerning local government will not be considered, nor will parts of the 2008 Act dealing with regulation of health professions and public health protection.

3 'The right of citizens and patients to participate in the decision-making process affecting healthcare . . . must be viewed as a fundamental and integral part of any democratic society' – Council of Europe, Recommendation No. R (2000) 5, *The Development of Structures for Citizen and Patient Participation in the Decision-making Process Affecting Healthcare* (adopted by the Committee of Ministers 24 February 2000), Appendix: Guideline 1.