

LABOUR COMMENT
A HESITATION, BUT STILL
NO CONSULTATION



With NHS satisfaction levels the highest ever, and record investment, no-one would have believed after the election that health was going to be the most controversial issue of the first year. Radical reform of the NHS and top-down reorganisation was not put before the electorate by any party.

Nothing as destabilising to the NHS as the Health and Social Care Bill was envisaged. Acting as hands-off CEO, the PM appeared to be unaware of the detail of the secretary of state's plans, which would leave PCTs and staff in turmoil.

When the white paper was published in July – there was no green paper – it was immediately clear that there was going to be a root and branch reform; more revolutionary than evolutionary, ideological rather than consensual. Health professionals raised their concerns at the health select committee evidence sessions and our reports made it clear that many of the proposals would not work.

Not only was there no evidence that this was the best way to reform the NHS, but the staff of the NHS were expected – and still are, despite the pause in the bill – to undertake drastic reorganisation without having first been consulted.

The coalition government should have known that there was no groundswell of support from patients, professionals and indeed politicians. Driving through legislation of such radical change and complexity, 12 parts and 22 schedules, and expecting no-one to notice, smacks of inexperience or arrogance.

There was adequate opportunity, at the pause of the bill, to rethink the proposals and draft a new, clearer bill. Moreover, the costs to the public purse have yet to be fully quantified. Inexperience of the legislative process and a lack of joined-up government overseeing legislation are the lessons learned from the passage of this bill. 🇯🇵

Valerie Vaz is Labour MP for Walsall South
and a member of the health select committee