

NEWS

Oncologist to stand against prime minister in general election

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The BMJ

The National Health Action (NHA) Party has announced its 12 candidates to stand against high profile members of the UK government at next year's general election.

The party, formed by doctors and campaigners in 2012 to defend against the negative effects of the coalition's healthcare reorganisation,¹ aims to unseat MPs from the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, which, it believes, have damaged the health service since being elected in 2010.

The south London GP Louise Irvine, who led a successful court battle against the health secretary for England, Jeremy Hunt, over the proposed closure of Lewisham Hospital's emergency department,² will stand against Hunt in his South West Surrey constituency.

Other candidates include the oncologist Clive Peedell, the party's co-leader, who will stand against the prime minister, David Cameron, in his Witney constituency. Other notable targets include the secretary of state for work and pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, who will be challenged by the nurse Kathryn Anderson in Chingford and Woodford Green. Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg's Sheffield Hallam seat is being targeted by the disability rights campaigner Naveen Judah.

Elsewhere, the GP Bob Gill will stand against the immigration minister, James Brokenshire, in Old Bexley and Sidcup; the Brighton University mental health expert Carl Walker will stand in East Worthing and Shoreham; and the former GP Paul Hobday will challenge the Conservative MP Helen Grant in Maidstone.

Other candidates include prominent hospital campaigners Karen Howell of the Support Stafford Hospital Campaign, who will be standing in Stafford, and Dave Ash of the Keep our St Helier Hospital Campaign, who will be taking on the Liberal Democrat former health minister Paul Burstow in Sutton and Cheam.

The former health board executive and businessman Rik Evans, who recently resigned as a director of his local NHS hospital trust in protest at the perceived privatisation of NHS "hotel" services such as portering, cleaning, catering, and security, will be aiming to unseat the Conservative Sarah Newton in Truro.

The Oxford health journalist Roseanne Edwards will be standing in Banbury, where the Conservative MP, Tony Baldry, is due

to stand down. Richard Taylor, a doctor and co-leader of the NHA Party, confirmed that he would be standing to regain his old seat of Wyre Forest, which he won as an independent in 2001, and held in 2005, after campaigning against the closure of his local hospital.

The NHA Party made the announcements at its annual conference in London on Sunday 7 September.

Peedell said, "If we could get even just one or two MPs elected, the public would know there'd be representatives in parliament on whom they could always rely to act purely in the best interests of patients and of the NHS, without letting political ideology get in the way. For too long the NHS has been used as a political football. In the event of a hung parliament it's possible that we could be in a strong position to influence health policy."

"Huge numbers of people are disillusioned with the current political choices on offer. We hope that, in the areas where we're standing, voters will back our message about saving and improving the NHS and our wider concern for a fair and healthy society."

He added, "I'm challenging David Cameron because he is ultimately responsible for the policies of his party and the coalition government, which include the dismantling and increasing privatisation of the NHS. The public don't want this, and his party and the coalition government had no democratic mandate to do it. He must be held to account at the ballot box."

Irvine said, "I've faced Jeremy Hunt in the courts—and beaten him twice. Now I'll face him at the ballot box. He needs to be held to account for what he's doing to our NHS and the way in which he has bulldozed democracy, changing the law to push through hospital closures when he was beaten in court. I look forward to a serious debate with the health secretary about the future of our NHS."

1 Torjesen I. Doctors opposed to NHS reforms set up a new political party. *BMJ* 2012;344:e3734.

2 Dyer C. Health secretary loses court battle over Lewisham Hospital. *BMJ* 2013;347:f6558.

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