

Will Britain's National Health go private?

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Britain's National Health Service has suddenly withdrawn an invitation for bids from the private sector to run the country's primary care trusts.

The move came after the Department of Health was questioned by the London Times about an advertisement placed in the Official Journal of the European Union encouraging the world's biggest health companies to apply for the chance to spend a majority of the NHS budget, the London Times reported Friday.

Primary care trusts not only fund general practice surgeries but also commission hospital operations and have a large say over which drugs patients in their area can receive. They account for about 80 percent of the \$145 billion NHS budget.

While the government has tentatively suggested expanding the use of private firms, the six-page contract notice placed by the Department of Health reportedly went much further than intended, The Times said.

After withdrawing the notice, the department told the newspaper errors gave the false impression that clinical services provided by the primary care trusts would be phased out in favor of the private sector.

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