

British minister heckled over health reforms

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Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron sits next to Health Secretary Andrew Lansley (2nd left) during a round table discussion on the future of the NHS (National Health Service) at Downing Street in London Monday, Feb. 20, 2012. Britain's health minister was angrily heckled Monday as he entered a meeting on divisive health care reforms, which the government says will improve efficiency _ and opponents claim threaten the foundations of the country's state-funded health service. (AP Photo / Stefan Wermuth , Pool)

(AP) -- Britain's health minister was angrily heckled Monday over health care reforms that the government says will improve efficiency but opponents claim threaten the foundation of the country's state-funded health care service.

Protesters jostled [Health Secretary](#) Andrew Lansley as he arrived for the 10 Downing Street meeting on the reforms. Demonstrator June Hautot, 75, accused Lansley of trying to privatize the [National Health Service](#).

"The NHS is not for sale. There is no privatization," Lansley told her - but the government is still struggling to convince skeptics of that.

Britain's Conservative-led government is planning a major overhaul of the NHS, which provides free treatment to all Britons. The government says the reforms will cut bureaucracy, improve treatment and give doctors more control over [health care management](#).

Opponents say the changes will give private companies a bigger share of health care and undermine the system's universality.

The overstretched health service is Britain's biggest employer, costing more than 100 billion pounds (\$158 billion) a year, and is a source of both constant complaints and national pride.

Making the system more efficient has proved an elusive goal since the NHS was established in 1948. The latest reforms come as Britain seeks to trim spending by 80 billion pounds (\$127 billion) by 2015 in a bid to cut the country's deficit.

The proposed law is meeting stiff resistance in Parliament, and more than 150,000 people have signed an [online petition](#) calling for it to be scrapped.

The sweeping reforms are opposed by several large medical organizations, including the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing and health care unions.

They said they were not invited to Monday's meeting, which was attended by government officials and the new consortia of doctors that will take over [health management](#) from local health care trusts.

"There are quite a few myths that we need to bust about this reform,"

Prime Minister David Cameron said Monday, insisting he would push the changes through. "We need to do everything we can to explain to people that this is about improving and enhancing our NHS, not in any way endangering it."

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