



Lansley writes out prescription for progress

Stephen Exley

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For a man in charge of providing healthcare for 62 million people, Andrew Lansley cuts a remarkably relaxed figure as he finishes his baguette, washed down with – naturally – Diet Coke.



Andrew Lansley

“I am responsible for a budget of £105 billion,” he smiles, as he reflects on the size of the task facing him. “It’s a frightfully huge amount of taxpayers’ money. I have to say, I’m unreasonably enjoying the experience.”

After being groomed for the office since being appointed shadow secretary of state for health in 2004, the 53-year-old was in no mood to be overawed when he was given the position for real.

“It’s been six and a half years,” he explains, “so it feels hands-on from day one. It’s a real challenge intellectually, and I have the opportunity to do things I have been working on for a long time. A lot of things are already starting to get moving.”

His watchwords of “push, pace, strategy, direction” reflect his burning ambitions to see his policy ideas put into practice, even after his first fortnight in the job.

Health has been a passion of Lansley’s since his childhood, with his father working in the pathology laboratory at East Ham Memorial Hospital.

“When I first went to Westminster in 1997,” he says, “I took a job in a

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healthcare select committee, and it's just continued to grow since then.

"When Michael Howard became leader, he asked me what I wanted to. And I said health."

His experience in the shadow cabinet has given Lansley an understanding which he believes may have eluded his five predecessors during Labour's 13 years in power.

"Blair used to move them around all the time," Lansley explains. "It was just hopeless. We are trained for it, we are ready for it."

And, while much has been made of the ideological divide between the Tories and their new coalition partners, the Liberal Democrats, he believes there is a firm commitment on both sides to making the marriage of convenience a long and fruitful union.

"We have got a job to do," he insists. "I get the sense people like seeing government behaving properly again. By definition, we can't do party politics in government. Everybody sees everybody else's work. We are all one team."

This emphasis on co-operation is at the heart of Lansley's vision of the NHS "family". He is keen to see decisions taken by medical professionals, rather than imposed from the outside by interfering politicians.

"What we do know is that a doctor is better than a bureaucrat," he says. "They need to be able to make their own decisions, and I think they are already starting to feel that. It is a big culture shift, and I think they feel rather empowered."

"We need to make sure we meet clinical standards, and there has to be accountability, but we are focusing on getting them the information, letting them take control."

But having inherited a massive public services deficit, Lansley is well aware the challenge will not be easy.

"Now we are going to have to do existing things more cost effectively," he admits. "What I have found is that there are very few people who think that isn't possible."

"The deal with the NHS is clear – every penny saved is a penny available for reinvestment for improving the quality of what we do."

"From time to time, standards don't match up. The health service has got to have a system for identifying where it lets patients down. It isn't just something we must accept. We are dealing with people's lives here."

Turning to local issues, Lansley is at pains to defend plans to bring in a private company to run Hinchingsbrooke Hospital.

"It will continue to be an NHS hospital," he insists. "It is part of the NHS family of trusts. Even if it becomes a foundation trust one day – and it has a lot to do to get there – it will be part of the NHS. What we are doing is outsourcing



management, not changing ownership.

“We have got to be sure that the services they run are first rate, and not being constantly threatened by a new deficit emerging. If we have got a company that’s failing, what do we do? Bring new management in. It’s exactly the same.

“All these organisations have the capacity to run the services.”

In contrast, thriving hospitals, such as Addenbrooke’s, should be left alone and free of Government meddling, Lansley believes.

And he envisages the Cambridge hospital playing a much wider role, both in the local community and further afield.

“Hospital care has been seen as separate from healthcare in the community,” he explains. “I think it is important to have a more integrated service for patients.

“I also want NHS trusts to establish themselves as not just international leaders in clinical results and research but international leaders in managing healthcare systems. (Addenbrooke’s) could be one of the leading organisations for providing healthcare systems.

“It should be Europe’s leading life sciences centre. Why shouldn’t Addenbrooke’s have a company that sits alongside it, which would be responsible for setting up hospitals in other countries, even running them? And the financial benefits, we would filter them back into the NHS.”

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