

Farnham Humanists panel discussion: 'What is happening to our NHS?'

By Chelsea Hobman, UCA Farnham, BA (Hons) Year 1 Journalism

The Farnham Humanists group held a non-political public panel discussion at South Farnham School on 13th November at 8pm. The topic was 'What is happening to our NHS?'

On the panel was an array of different voices; the chair, Belinda Schwehr, is a qualified lawyer and practised in the adults' social services field as a barrister; Sir Mike Aaronson, chairman of Frimley Park Foundation Hospital Trust; Harry Baker, patient representative; Dr David Brown, a local GP, and Dr Jane Dempster, local GP. All five panel members gave their personal opinions on what they think is happening to our NHS.

Although the talk was non-political, Sir Mike Aaronson of Frimley Park stated that the NHS is a 'political football' which the politicians use 'to try to score points against their opponents'. The members of the public and the four other panel members agreed with this point.



Dr Brown said that the 'way the NHS is currently run is open to corruption (or at least cosiness)' and that he is saddened to hear that 12,000 patients were left lying on trollies for over 12 hours within the last year of records, and that there are 20,000 nursing vacancies unfilled. On the other hand, Dr Dempster is optimistic about the NHS and stated '...in consultation with our local population, we have our best opportunity in a generation to bring about change and improve quality in our services.'

Harry Baker, the patient representative, shed a positive light on Frimley Park Hospital; whilst he has 'not been very impressed' by some of the things he has seen there, he continued to believe that the overall quality of care at Frimley Park is 'extremely high'.

Belinda Schwehr explained that an acquaintance known to her had recently qualified for free NHS healthcare status and funding because he was terminally ill. "You qualify for free NHS healthcare if you are in a rapidly deteriorating phase of a terminal condition... and he died three days later." Ms Schwehr explained that "...the State was saved the indignity of sending him a bill for the privilege of care whilst dying." She felt that legal and financial accountability are two wholly different things, and explained that until people understand that they do have some actual legal rights, then "we can't really talk about accountability."

Many of the points raised were explored through discussion and the audience asked questions about later GP practising hours, funding, and other concerns. The panel dealt well with the questions that were fired at them, and the audience got most of the answers they were looking for.

The Farnham Humanists group is a local organisation who offer an opportunity to explore the meaning of life without religion. They host events that allow members of the public to have their say, and they also do work within the community. The next event the Farnham Humanists are hosting is "Written in the Stars: How to Live Happily in a Deterministic Universe" with Professor Jim Al-Khalili, physicist and president of the British Humanist Association, which will be held at the Trinity Centre, 5 Trinity Churchyard, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 3RR on Wednesday 26th February at 7pm. The tickets are £5 in advance, or £6 on the door. The talk is in celebration of Farnham Humanists' 10th anniversary.

You can contact the Farnham Humanists by telephoning 01252 794021, and by visiting their website, www.farnham-humanists.org.uk