

## WORKSHEET FOR KS3 AND GCSE HISTORY

### Post NHS (1948-1986)

Free at the point of delivery

The National Health Service Act 1946 came into effect on 5 July 1948 replacing the patchwork of private, municipal and charity health insurance schemes that had been on offer in the early 20th century. After a White Paper in 1944, the Labour government, led by Clement Attlee, created the NHS as part of their 'cradle-to-grave' welfare-state reforms. In the aftermath of the Second World War this was very popular among the electorate as many people had laid down their lives for King and country.

Aneurin Bevan, the newly appointed Minister for Health, was given the task of establishing a National Health Service, but not all the credit can be given to him as the blueprint for a free medical service was the vision of the Socialist Medical Association (SMA) – a body founded by a number of Labour party members in 1930. Their aim was to create a free socialised medical service, open to all, where doctors would be salaried employees rather than private practitioners. The SMA influenced medical and Labour Party policies during the inter-war period – particularly in London – and at a local level influenced the development of healthcare provision in Hackney.

Somerville Hastings, the president of the SMA, indeed claimed publicly that the post-war Labour government's National Health Service was in large part attributable to the work of the SMA. However, Bevan and Hastings did not share the same vision. Bevan thought that a national health service should be a centrally controlled system rather than a system operated by regional authorities. He thought this would prevent inequalities between different regions. He also made concessions to the medical profession over issues such as private practice – something that Hastings did not support. Although a commitment was made to develop health centres, this only happened at the John Scott Health Centre in Hackney. Despite Hastings' differences of opinion he did welcome and defend the National Health Service, but viewed it only as the first step towards a socialised medical service.

On 5 July 1948, at Park Hospital in Manchester, Bevan unveiled the National Health Service and stated "We now have the moral leadership of the world".

#### How did people access their free treatment?

Bevan proposed that each resident of the UK would be signed up to a specific General Practice (GP) as the point of entry into the system, and would have access to any kind of treatment they needed without having to raise the money to pay for it. Treatment included primary care, in-patient care, long-term healthcare, ophthalmology and dentistry. But the cost of the new NHS soon took its toll on government finances. On 21 April 1951 the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugh Gaitskell, proposed that there should be a one-shilling (5p) prescription charge and new charges for half the cost of dentures and spectacles. Bevan resigned from the Cabinet in protest, which led to a split in the party that contributed to the electoral

defeat of the Labour government in 1951. The one-shilling prescription charge was introduced in 1952 together with a £1 flat rate fee for ordinary dental treatment. Prescription charges were abolished in 1965, but reintroduced in June 1968.

### The first purpose-built NHS health centre

On 14 October 1952, the Woodberry Down Health Centre (later renamed the John Scott Health Centre) was opened by Labour MP Somerville Hastings in a blaze of national publicity. Located on Green Lanes in Hackney it was the first purpose-built NHS health centre in Britain. Somerville Hastings, the former President of the SMA. Socialist medicine had for years promoted the idea of local health centres as the main providers of preventive healthcare, and the Woodberry Down Health Centre was intended to be the prototype for a new kind of 'comprehensive' health centre that would be built throughout the country. It was the first, and certainly the largest, purpose-built health centre in Britain.

Inside, a unique experiment was taking place: "For the first time in the history of the public services five health units were to be brought together under one roof". These consisted of medical practitioners units on the ground floor with a large communal reception area and entrance onto Green Lanes. The other wings housed dental surgery, school health, child welfare, antenatal care, and a remedial exercise and child guidance unit. Each unit had examination rooms, treatment rooms, and waiting rooms. There was a canteen, a lecture hall, and a large doctor's common room, a flat for the night doctor, a caretaker's flat, an operating theatre and the telephone exchange.

The Woodberry Down Health Centre never became a prototype, and no more purpose-built health centres were built as part of this early NHS initiative. Medical politics trumped socialist medicine; most doctors jealously guarded their single-handed practices, and group practice was slow to arrive. GP's did not want to work in state-owned health centres, and refused to back them. Even the first Woodberry Down doctors kept up their own surgeries elsewhere, while one doctor thought that the doctor's common room was "a waste of public funds".

### Hackney Hospital: a local perspective

When the NHS was established in 1948 only a handful of hospitals in Hackney had been modernised by the London County Council in the 1930s. The German Hospital and Hackney Hospital had both been built modern facilities, but otherwise, most of Hackney's hospitals occupied outmoded 19th-century buildings.

By the late-1970s these buildings, particularly at Hackney Hospital were even less fit-for-purpose than in the early 1950s. John Pilger, an investigative journalist had produced a documentary for ITV, which was broadcast on 12 September 1977. This programme was made as a result of the *Daily Mirror* newspaper's campaign to reveal the dangerous and irreparable effects that Government cutbacks were having on the NHS at the time.

On 20 January 1977, Pilger wrote a damning article in the *Daily Mirror* where he stated: “The casualty department like most of the hospital has lost little of its workhouse atmosphere – except for the dedication of the staff. The old operating theatre fills with fumes and dust from the streets outside, vibrates with the traffic, and has to be used as a public thoroughway when the lift breaks down.” Indeed medical standards were collapsing at Hackney and with further spending cuts planned doctors feared the further deterioration in care was on its way. During this period it was decided to build a new hospital to replace Hackney Hospital.

### What happened to healthcare in Hackney during the 1980s?

On Sunday 5 July 1986, exactly 38 years after the establishment of the NHS, Homerton University Hospital opened on the site of the former Eastern Fever and Smallpox Hospital on Homerton Row. Construction began on the new Homerton Hospital in 1982, but it had been planned by a number of staff at Hackney Hospital since the mid-1970s. Dr Tunstall Pedoe, a cardiologist at Hackney Hospital, was very involved in setting up the new Homerton University Hospital – eventually becoming Chair of the Commissioning Team – an achievement of which he was particularly proud. When the Homerton opened it was the first new hospital to have been built in Hackney for well over 70 years. It was designed to bring together all general hospital services from across Hackney, which led to the closure of Hackney Hospital, the Mothers’ Hospital, St Leonard’s Hospital and the German Hospital. Designed by leading hospital architects Yorke, Rosenberg and Mardall it was influenced by the idea of a “total healthcare delivery system” developed in line with Professor McKeon’s concept of the ‘balanced teaching hospital’ – a large complex that replaced the separate hospitals for the acutely ill, mentally ill, and for those suffering from special diseases or conditions.

### Questions

1. What happened in 1948?
2. Why was special about Woodberry Down Health Centre?
3. Why were Hugh Gaitskell’s proposals controversial?
4. What was happening in the NHS during the 1970s?
5. Why was the Homerton University Hospital opened?
6. What are the challenges in creating a 21st-century healthcare? Explain your answer.