

Consultant voices fears about ambitious private partnership

**EXCLUSIVE BY
EDWARD DAVIE**

CONCERNS HAVE been raised about a public-private partnership that has taken over a trust's pathology services — and plans to expand.

GSTS Pathology is a 50-50 partnership between the Guy's and St Thomas's NHS Foundation Trust and private company Serco. It has been running the trust's pathology services since earlier this year.

Consultants remain as NHS trust employees but are seconded to the new organisation for up to 50 per cent of their clinical sessions.

The organisation, which is the preferred bidder for the

trust's Bedford laboratory, is also in talks with King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust about running its pathology services.

When questioned by *BMA News*, GSTS Pathology managing director Kevin Cox did not deny that the company was aiming to win a 30 per cent share of the pathology services market in England.

GSTS's ambitions were revealed at a CCSC pathology subcommittee meeting by Guy's and St Thomas's Local Negotiating Committee chair Anthony Wierzbicki.

London chemical pathologist Dr Wierzbicki, who works for GSTS while on

secondment from Guy's and St Thomas's, said he believed the price of complex testing would 'increase significantly' if and when GSTS took over a 'critical mass' of the market. He also had concerns about the terms and conditions of seconded consultants.

Dr Cox said that while their 'activities day to day' were managed by GSTS, seconded staff retained their NHS rights.

CCSC pathology subcommittee chair Anne Thorpe said she was 'very concerned' about NHS consultants being seconded to privately-run enterprises.

Concerns about NHS marketisation prompted the

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BMA to launch its Look After Our NHS campaign.

But Guy's and St Thomas's associate medical director Jonathan Edgeworth said: 'The contract expects a 30 per cent efficiency improvement over the next three years and we have already developed new tests and driven down phlebotomy and cervical screening waiting times. I sit on the trust side and hold GSTS to account. Because it is a 50-50 split half of any surplus comes back to the trust.'

● BMA secondment advice is at www.bma.org.uk/employmentandcontracts/