



NAME:

D.O.B:

Hairmyres Hospital
East Kilbride

2001

Privately funded
flagship with chronic

staff shortages and
morale dropping to

dangerous levels

NOTES:

Severe incontinence
Developing lesions
Vulnerable to infection
Radical treatment
required

DOCTOR'S SIGNATURE:



CRITICAL CONDITION

If Hairmyres was on life-support, you'd be tempted to pull the plug. Instead, the flagship hospital for the Private Finance Initiative is held up as the way forward for the failing NHS. Staff there show Eamonn O'Neill how the government's miracle cure puts patients' lives at risk

A FINE, expensively produced new brochure – *Hairmyres Hospital: First Year Anniversary Booklet* – was recently handed out to staff at the East Kilbride hospital to celebrate the facility's birthday. Inside the front page, a short statement from general manager David Hume glowed: "I am very proud to have been associated with the move to the new hospital and its first year of opening..."

The general manager goes on to praise the hard-working staff who "deliver the highest standard of care possible to our patients". But a year after the opening of the first Private Finance Initiative hospital in the country, those same staff are telling a different story.

There are holes in the walls, they whisper, tiles falling off the ceiling, rubbish sitting around, human excrement on the floor. Worst of all, there is a chronic shortage of properly trained staff. Such symptoms are all too familiar from the crumbling NHS. But this is the flagship hospital that was supposed to showcase the benefits of the PFI; and after just 12 months it is in danger of falling apart.

The details of the arrangement between the NHS Trust which runs Hairmyres and the consortium which built it remain secret, but information leaked about similar deals in other areas of the UK have led to accusations that Trusts are not getting the high-quality hospitals they expected.

Last autumn, Sir Stuart Lipton, head of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, a government advisory board, examined the plans for new PFI hospitals and announced: "There is not enough attention to detail, not enough care, not enough commitment. It is not that the buildings are being built inefficiently, but the contractor has got nothing to do with the medical process – they are two separate functions, which effectively should be one."

One member of staff at Hairmyres told me:

"This was the 'Glitterdome' for us, the jewel in the crown... You expect it to be all bright and shiny with all the buttons working... [but] there are lots of unhappy people." Another source familiar with the construction said simply: "This is the cheapest building you could put up... You can't build anything cheaper than this."

IT'S a typical busy weekday inside the waiting area at Hairmyres. Patients sit quietly in plastic seats, waiting for their names to be called by a receptionist. In a corner of the room is a children's play area. Small, soft furnishings and a range of colourful plastic toys are scattered here and there. Today, a little girl, maybe three or four, plays innocently among them.

"That's where the sewage flooded," says a source accompanying me. "The carpet was lifted numerous times. The whole area where that wee lassie is was filthy. And I'm not sure how clean it is now. We're worried. That's why we're talking to you."

Minutes later I am standing in front of another shocking scene. An internal courtyard is flanked on three sides by office buildings. Windows looking out on the courtyard are wide open. The French windows I am looking through, however, are locked. Small wonder, really, given that a greying sludge of sewage clings to the pebbles. "Those are half-disintegrated bedpans that are flushed into the drainage system," I'm told when I point out some solidified chunks. "They end up here because the system can't cope." This is not a one-off. Two weeks earlier I'd visited the same spot. It was raining then. The sewage had been thinner, more diluted and even more clearly visible. Now, in the sun, it looks like a disgusting layer of cement.

"After the liquid drains through the soil the potential exists for organisms to remain on the surface. And those organisms which can cause diseases in humans could be present," says Dr Tony

Grimison, head of the University of Strathclyde's Environmental Health Department. "What you'd find depends upon what diseases are already present in the people who are using the facilities in the hospital. There is a potential risk to public health."

It's difficult to believe that senior management at Hairmyres would miss such hygiene problems on their own doorstep. In the glossy brochure, the general manager admits: "Clearly, there were a number of teething problems in the first few months of opening as we adapted to our new working practices and environments. However, I believe that most of these have now been successfully resolved."

A spokesperson from South Lanarkshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust – which incorporates Hairmyres – issued a statement last year that similar problems had been "addressed", while the Health Department promised that its officials would monitor the situation closely. "If a particular service is constantly below standard, the Trust can invoke provisions within the PFI contract to ensure... the re-tendering of the service [in question]."

But one year on, staff at the hospital insist many problems, far from being addressed, are actually worse. Monitoring is a joke, they say. If any officials from the Scottish Health Department have been watching the situation, then no one I spoke to has seen them. No one has any knowledge of any services being re-tendered either.

"There's a constant sewage problem on the ground floor. We've had major disasters [including] consultants' rooms wasted and re-carpeted and repaired," says one source. "The kids' toys have been covered in human excreta, and have then been hand-washed [by cleaning staff employed by internal hospital contractors] and put back into the play area. In my opinion it's not safe."

It's been alleged that sewage has even flooded out of manholes, breaching 90lb covers that ▶