

Day 14: Nottingham to Loughborough

Another great day. Bobbi Wallace, a colleague from my South Tyneside days, who has just retired from Chapel Hill, North Carolina and was over in the UK to see her daughter joined us. Bobbi walked some of the way and we caught up on old days and she also updated me on the healthcare developments in USA. Between Medicare part A, part B, Medi-Plus and Drugs cover I almost lost the plot – suffice to say that a) Bobbi is well educated and knows her way around the system and even then she had to seek (and pay for) professional help to decide which policies to buy and b) it is going to cost her \$300 per month, and this is when she is in good health (and long may it continue). The American nightmare may become a reality here if we are not careful.

I have made my escape plan with Bobbi's help –she has a house in Costa Rica and has invited me, and given what they have managed to achieve there in human and social development Costa Rica sounds nice. I hope it does not come to that though and that our march will help stop this nightmare scenario happening in the NHS. And I am doing my bit, I am on TV – supposedly 10 seconds of my interview made it on the news last night, and a few strangers even came up to me on the march today to say hello having seen me on TV. Not quite the 15 minutes that Andy Warhol talked about, but I guess in the age of twitter, 10 seconds is good enough!

And it is not just me, there are increasing numbers of people who are doing their bit and joining us, and so we had another great send off from Nottingham. But guess what, Ken Clarke was not able to join us, sadly, even though we called in on his office on the way. I still remember the 'Working for Patients' policy which introduced the internal markets and set the scene for what we have today, and which was overseen by Ken Clarke in the late 1980s. And of course, doctors do remember him for his saying about "Doctors reaching for their wallets". He is certainly not short of a quid or two- having made a killing (*sic*) from tobacco industry. Most of us struggle with the ethics of being a health minister and then working with tobacco industry, and of course he was not alone as Margaret Thatcher also promoted them.

We walk and talk about the state of the world, the morals of politicians and the growing influence of the oligarchs. We wonder why we cannot learn from Cuba and Costa Rica, and we talk about Harry Smith : "So, it has always been difficult for me to listen to politicians, proud possessors of health insurance and shares in private health care companies, when they talk about how the health services that we fought so hard to build must change".

We end up discussing whether the NHS is now institutionally corrupt – and that it was not possible for people working in the system to stop the gradual slide, even if they wanted to. We hear stories of how good people have been leant on, or ended by being made redundant. Not everyone has the energy to become a whistle blower.

The day started with the baby, and young Sol full of energy and looking forward to another exciting day- just as it should be for children; they came to drop me at the Nottingham County Council offices. The march today was well paced, but mostly on the busy Loughborough road, often in single file, making conversations harder. And being the 14th day, it was also harder on my feet especially the left one which has

been pretty sore for 2 days now. Thankfully my old medical school friend, Umesh Roy, a GP in Leicester, has picked me up and taken me home and with his wife Dulcie is looking after me. I am in good hands and hope to be ready in the morning for the next stage.



Whose NHS, our NHS

Sadly Ken Clarke was not available



Setting off to drop me

Rajan Madhok

29 August 2014

DECLARATION: I am walking in personal capacity and the views expressed are mine alone, and are meant to inform not criticise or insult. If you like them, tell others and if you do not, tell me- just kidding, but do help me with my prejudices/arrogance. I may be old but can still learn. Blogs available at www.leadershipforhealth.com