REF2021

Institution: University of Warwick

Unit of Assessment: D28 – History

Title of case study: People's History of the NHS

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2020

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Roberta Bivins	Professor	01/08/2008-present
Mathew Thomson	Professor	01/10/1998-present
Jennifer Crane	Research Fellow	01/01/2016 - 31/03/2019
George Gosling	Research Fellow	01/09/2015 - 28/02/2017
Jane Hand	Research Fellow	18/03/2015 – 21/12/2020
Natalie Jones	Research Fellow	01/11/2015 - 31/10/2018
Gareth Millward	Research Fellow	01/09/2017 - 28/02/2021
Jack Saunders	Research Fellow	01/01/2016 - 31/12/2018

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-19

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

The National Health Service is regarded as sacred and rarely subjected to critical public assessment. Warwick's research on the history of the NHS underpinned and extensively informed the development of a three-part television BBC documentary: *The NHS: A People's History* (BBC4, July 2018). The historical perspective of the team's research helped shape the direction and content of the programmes, guiding the approach of the programme makers and, through the episodes, increasing public understanding of the NHS. The Warwick team contributed to every stage of the documentary process, opening up a new history of the NHS focused on meaning and belief, providing an essential corrective to presentist and exclusively triumphalist accounts. Alongside the documentary, the team also created an archive of personal stories and memories of the NHS, making a major contribution to the 70th anniversary of the NHS.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

'The NHS: A People's History' drew on research produced under a Wellcome Trust Investigator Award on the Cultural History of the NHS (PIs Bivins and Thomson; Research Fellows Crane, Gosling, Hand, Jones, Millward, Saunders) and also on earlier research on the histories of race (Bivins) and mental health (Thomson) under the NHS.

The major achievement of the research was to create a new social and cultural history of the NHS, turning attention beyond the development of policy, to the histories of experience and meaning, extended across the full seventy years of the service. This entailed testing and challenging existing assumptions and also uncovering new histories. The research resulted in a series of journal and book publications and was brought to the attention of a broader public through the People's History of the NHS website (hereafter *PHoNHS*), which crowd-sourced memories of the NHS to curate a set of digital resources and a virtual museum (3.1).

Underpinning research:

1. Demonstrated that healthcare before the NHS was more extensive, more economically accessible, and more popular than previously understood, setting the 'revolution' of 1948 and the meaning of a 'free' service in fresh perspective (3.1; 3.2).
2. Developed a history of the changing experience and representation of race and racism within the NHS in relation to staffing and treatment (e.g. sickle cell), and showed its significance for broader understanding of national identity and immigration (3.3; 3.4).
3. Highlighted the full scale and rich diversity of the NHS workforce, the special meaning of work, its relationship to belief in the NHS, and the importance of industrial relations in our thinking about the NHS, democracy, and social solidarity (3.1; 3.4).
4. Opened up a social history of the meaning and experience of treatment and provision under the NHS and of tensions and difficulties in light of social change, the erosion of social hierarchies and prejudices, and rising expectations (3.1; 3.3; 3.4; 3.7).
5. Set the NHS in perspective through development of histories of i) crucial decisions on priorities and the comparative neglect of social care and public health; ii) local and national divisions with the NHS; and iii) the significance of international comparison and interconnection (3.1; 3.3; 3.5; 3.6; 3.7).
6. Provided a history of the development of popular faith in the NHS over time and its passage to what has been described as a 'national religion', entailing i) a process of 'learning the NHS' through experience and culture; ii) the development of activism, and displays of public and political support in response to perceived crisis; and iii) the role of branding (3.1; 3.7).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

In addition to the *People's History of the NHS* website, Bivins, Thomson and their team's publications include monographs, a peer-reviewed journal article and chapters in edited collections:

1. **Bivins, Roberta; Crane, Jennifer; Gosling, George; Hand, Jane; Jones, Natalie; Millward, Gareth; Saunders, Jack and Thomson, Mathew** (2016) People's History of the NHS website: https://peopleshistorynhs.org.

2. **Gosling, George** (February 2017) *Payment and Philanthropy in British Healthcare 1918-1948.* Manchester: Manchester University Press. ISBN:978-1-5261-1432-7

3. **Bivins, Roberta** (2015) *Contagious Communities: Medicine, Migration, and the NHS in Post War Britain.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725282.001.0001

4. **Bivins, Roberta** (2017) *Picturing Race in the British National Health Service, 1948-1988.* Twentieth Century British History, 28(1). Pp 83–109. doi:10.1093/tcbh/hww059

5. **Bivins, Roberta** and **Crane, Jennifer** (2017) *What is the N in the NHS?* In Quilter-Pinner, Harry and Gorsky, Martin (eds.) *Devo-Then, Devo-Now: What Can the History of the NHS Tell Us About Localism and Devolution in Health and Care.* London: Institute for Public Policy Research, pp.10-13. https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-08/1502961603_devo-then-devo-now-august-2017.pdf

6. **Hand, Jane** (2020) '*Look After Yourself': visualising obesity as a public health concern in 1970s and 1980s Britain.* In Jackson, Mark and Moore, Martin (eds.) *Balancing the Self: Medicine, Politics and the Regulation of Health in the Twentieth Century.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp.95-124. ISBN:978-1-5261-3213-0

7. **Crane, Jennifer** (2018) *'Save our NHS': activism, information-based expertise and the 'new times' of the 1980s.* Contemporary British History, 33 (1). pp. 52-74. doi:10.1080/13619462.2018.1525299

Funding: **Bivins, Roberta (PI)** The Cultural History of the NHS. Wellcome Trust Investigator Award in Health and Social Sciences. Ref: 104837/Z/14/Z. January 2015-December 2020. **(GBP578,898)**

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The outbreak of COVID-19 has demonstrated a widespread emotional attachment to the NHS and its centrality to notions of British identity. The team's research has had a significant impact on the public discourse around, and engagement with, its unique history, taking audiences beyond a focus on medical history to an understanding, and interrogation, of the cultural meaning of the NHS. It has done so by directly informing the development of the three-part BBC television documentary series *The NHS: A People's History* (BBC4, July 2018), which aired as a centrepiece of a series of programmes marking the 70th anniversary of the founding of the NHS. In collaboration with production company 7Wonder, the researchers were embedded within all stages of the process. In advance of the commissioning process, the team were integral in winning a Wellcome Trust bid that ensured an essential tranche of funding for the programmes, enabling the researchers to focus the series on the meaning of the NHS rather than on a history of medical progress.

Researchers worked alongside the production team on all aspects of the series including storyboarding; crowd-sourcing; interviewee identification; development of interview questions and programme themes; building networks between the project team with other key contributors; and providing guidance and corrections for factual accuracy and narrative nuance. Once the series aired, the team actively promoted the broadcasts through social media, linking users back to the content on the *PHoNHS* website, which informed each episode. This website subsequently extended the reach of the programmes beyond their screening, providing opportunities for viewers to discover more about this history and contribute by volunteering material and memories.

The team's research expertise substantially shaped the approach, direction and content of the programmes and thereby influenced public understanding of the history of the NHS. For example, the production team actively referred to Bivins' published research on race and the NHS (3.4) when writing scripts. The impact of this research on the production of the series is evident (and confirmed by the Series Producer, 5.1) in three areas:

   i)   the framing as a 'People's History' as one that examined the meaning of the NHS rather than the history of medicine across this period;
   ii)   the development of arguments about key changes, challenges and achievements;
   iii) the identification of evidence to illustrate this history.

1. The public-facing website 'People's History of the NHS' provided confirmation that using oral history and object-inspired stories was a feasible approach for the subject of the NHS. Researchers were able to guide the production team at an early stage in establishing how a thematic people-centred focus could be integrated with a chronological framework. The research was also fundamental in showing the production team how crucial it was to focus on the significance of the NHS rather than the more general story of medicine across this period.
2. In the context of the 70th anniversary of the NHS and a flood of media coverage that was largely celebratory in tone, the programmes crucially included some more critical findings and areas of debate, interpretation and conflict where appropriate. Researchers worked closely with the production team to ensure that the programmes challenged viewers' understanding of the history of the NHS. This theme was commented on positively by reviewers (*The Times* and *The Guardian,* 5.2). The team's research findings allowed the programmes to develop critical perspectives to the topic of the NHS.
3. The programmes' stories often drew directly from the team's research (e.g. Dr Macbeth and his GP Casebook, industrial action, Invacars, NHS branding, posters from campaigns against hospital closure, and the story of sickle cell).

Reflecting on the collaboration with Warwick, the Series Producer stated that the collaboration allowed the programme's narrative 'to make nuanced academic arguments emotional and accessible to a wider audience.' The partnership enabled her 'to make a series which really spoke to the emotional connection British people have with the NHS and the multiplicity of experiences we have had with the NHS over the past 70 years' (5.1).

The Executive Producer said working with the research team 'made a huge difference to the quality of stories and onscreen contributors…Warwick's research team helped in a myriad of ways', including providing editorial direction and ideas; contributing expertise; crowdsourcing key objects and enabling access to people and hospitals; and finally supporting the editing process. The production team 'had a very short schedule and budget and Warwick's help made the task of successfully making the series far more manageable and enjoyable' (5.3).

The three programmes were each an hour in length and were screened weekly at 9pm on BBC4, running across the July 5th anniversary of the NHS. The Warwick team were collectively and individually credited at the end of each programme. Audience figures for Episode One were 410,000 (5.4) and the programmes were widely reviewed in both the national and local press (5.2). Feedback from Twitter demonstrated that viewers found the programme though-provoking and emotionally resonant: 'you have opened so many eyes and hopefully doors for the future of the NHS'; 'great use of objects to illustrate peoples memories'; 'both shocking and hopeful' (5.5).

There were full write-ups of the opening programme in the series in *The Guardian, Daily Telegraph, The Express* and *The Times*. The *Daily Mail* gave the programme a 4* rating, while the *Guardian* described it as 'tremendously moving' including 'powerful stories', showing 'Britain at its most beautiful, but also its ugliest'. The *Times* described the programme as a valuable corrective to the rash of one-sided tributes that dominated television coverage of the 70th anniversary of the NHS: 'it gave us, along with rosy nostalgia, a dose of reality. Covering 1948 to 1973, it was a social history lesson that reminded us of the good old days when matron kept the ward spotless and waiting lists were short, but also when patients would say quite openly to a nurse from the Caribbean, "Get your black hands off me," and it was fine to call disabled cars "spaz chariots". Alex Brooker hosted a warts-and-all look at 70 years of the NHS. It was an eloquent, honest eulogy showing the NHS's beneficent brilliance' (5.2).

The programmes led to a rise in interest in the *PHoNHS* website, with 634 new users and 1,422 page views on the anniversary day (5 July 2018). Between January 2016 and July 2020, the website received 355,597 page views from 199,075 users (5.6). The website has extended the impact of the programmes beyond their airing, providing scope for the public to read about the findings behind the series and in response contribute reflections and material of their own. The website hosts articles on themes covered in the programmes, including childhood vaccination (52,687 views); mental health (29,623 views); birth control (9,168 view) and premature birth (6,568 page views) (5.6). The series' promotion of a people's history has also encouraged a rise in volunteers to participate in the ongoing crowd-sourcing of this history (currently 699), exemplifying the research teams' findings about the unique position the NHS holds in Britain's cultural history.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Statement from Series Producer
2. Press reviews
3. Statement from Executive Producer
4. Viewing figures
5. Social media feedback
6. Website data