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Means and ends [1]

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In the latest of a never-ending stream of moans about UK government budget ?cuts?, the Royal College of Nursing warns of looming reductions in front-line staff with the inevitable but unproven danger of a ?catastrophic? effect on care.

This is a knee-jerk defence used by all vested interests which confuse the way something is produced with the purpose of the production. The purpose of the NHS is not to maintain a set level of employment; it is to improve the health of its patients.

Progress is meeting a demand for better quality goods and services at lower cost. Throughout history, that has usually meant less labour.

In ancient Egypt, tens of thousands toiled for generations to erect the pyramids but now it only takes a couple of years for a few hundred tradesmen to build the Shard skyscraper, complete with lights, elevators and air conditioning. A single farmer today feeds hundreds whereas a century or so ago his entire (large) family was often barely able to feed itself. A modern factory uses a fraction of the labour now to produce cars that are cleaner, safer and more comfortable than ever.

There?s nothing to suggest that the various government services now on offer shouldn?t be subject to the same historical forces.

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