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Sixty seconds on . . . NHS reserves

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Running about in camouflage gear at the weekend?

No, silly, that's NHS army reservists. We're talking about NHS reserves which is a similar idea but for clinical and non-clinical volunteers to support the NHS.

Clinical volunteers? But we're understaffed

Well, yes, but the idea is that these volunteers will come from some of the 75,000 clinical staff who leave the NHS every year. So they'll come back to work—but for free.

Uh-huh. Whose idea is this?

It was proposed by Alan Mak, MP for Havant and Conservative party vice chair. Speaking in the House of Commons on 24 November he introduced the National Health Service Reserve Staff Bill.¹ It was supported by health secretary Matt Hancock.²

Don't we already have NHS volunteers?

Yes. Mak said that there are thought to be around 80,000 volunteers working across all acute trusts in England, contributing more than 13 million hours of volunteering every year. The aim of the bill is to formalise this.

With a badge and a uniform?

While you might be joking, Mak isn't. Drawing comparisons with the Police Special Constabulary, he said that every NHS reservist would "wear the same uniform and have the same equal status as their regular health service counterparts."

Will they be trained?

Mak said that NHS reservists would receive "appropriate training" and anyone working in a clinical discipline would be vetted and have to maintain the same up-to-date qualifications as their full time colleagues.

So, they would work with patients?

Mak's vision is that they would take on a range of roles. Clinically this could be as vaccinators, triage nurses, or telemedicine providers. "They could also provide general cover in non-specialist clinical roles if private sector staff supply agencies, locums, or staff banks were not available to help at short notice," he said.

It's all sounding a lot like a job

No, no, no. Because you're volunteering for a charity, remember. Oh, wait...

1 Mak A. National health service reserve staff. 24 November 2020. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-11-24/debates/818CCE92-FF45-4A92-BBFA-A633975FA365/NationalHealthServiceReserveStaff>.

2 Mak A. 24 November 2020. <https://twitter.com/AlanMakMP/status/1331173732556083201>