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25 August 2021

Did Sajid Javid open a ‘new hospital’ in Carlisle?

What was claimed

Sajid Javid claimed to be opening one of 48 new hospitals in August 2021, but it was actually a new cancer centre at an existing hospital in the pipeline years before Boris Johnson pledged to build 40 and later 48 new hospitals.

Our verdict

The new building is on the site of an old part of Carlisle Infirmary, which was planned before Boris Johnson pledged to build 40 new hospitals during the 2019 election.

A [post](#) on Facebook shows a screenshot of a [tweet](#) from Health Secretary Sajid Javid, saying “Looking forward to opening one of new 48 [sic] hospitals later today.”

The accompanying text on Facebook says: “More lies from the Conservative Party. This is a new cancer centre that was in the pipeline years before Mr Johnson made his 2019 pledge. It’s a building at an existing hospital in Carlisle paid for [by] private foreign investment & rented to the NHS for fifty years at a high cost. One new “hospital” is an entrance hall extension to the existing building.”

Mr Javid’s tweet has also been criticised by Labour MPs including shadow health secretary [Jonathan Ashworth](#), deputy leader [Angela Rayner](#) and [Dawn Butler](#).

It’s true that Sajid Javid officially opened a cancer care centre in Carlisle, Cumbria on [19 August](#). However, whether you’d call this a new hospital depends on your definition of those two words.

The Northern Centre for Cancer Care, North Cumbria was built on the [former site of the tower block building](#) at the Cumberland Infirmary. The Cumberland Infirmary in its current form was opened in [2000](#) and built under private finance initiative, or PFI.

[PFI](#) is a way of funding large public projects like hospitals, where private financiers pay upfront and are then paid back over many years. This seems to be what the post is referencing when it says the hospital is being “rented” to the NHS.

Although the Facebook post refers to foreign investment, the cancer centre was paid for in a joint venture by two British multinationals: [AMEC and Interserve](#).

What is a new hospital?

When challenged on Mr Javid’s claim, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) [told ITV](#): “There are numerous hospitals which specialise in one area of care or that are co-located—they are nonetheless hospitals.

“We have always been clear that the scale and size of each new hospital will vary depending on what is required for each local area.

“In some cases, that will be whole new hospitals on a new site, and in other cases, a new hospital on an existing site with dedicated facilities for particular conditions, such as cancer.”

Earlier this year the DHSC put out invites for NHS trusts to express an interest in being involved in “a further 8 new hospitals to deliver on our commitment to fund and build a total of 40 new hospitals by 2030”. The DHSC defined a new hospital as [one of three things](#):

- a whole new hospital site on a new site or current NHS land (either a single service or consolidation of services on a new site),
- a major new clinical building on an existing site or a new wing of an existing hospital (provided it contains a whole clinical service, such as maternity or children’s services),
- a major refurbishment and alteration of all but the building frame or main structure, delivering a significant extension to useful life which includes major or visible changes to the external structure.

Although the government [press release](#) refers to the new Carlisle building as a “cancer hospital”, the NHS trust’s [own website](#) refers to it as a “cancer centre”.

The new building is more than an entrance hall

The new cancer centre [contains](#):

- two linear accelerator radiotherapy machines
- a chemotherapy day unit with 15 treatment chairs and three single treatment rooms
- a CT scanner suite
- consultation, examination rooms and a small café area
- multipurpose rooms for complementary therapies and patient support.

According to the [DHSC](#), the centre “is a partnership between [North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust](#) and the Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust” but once complete, “the service will be run by [Newcastle Hospitals](#) as part of the Northern Centre for Cancer Care.”

Newcastle Hospitals Trust runs healthcare from a [number of different sites](#), including this new centre. The rest of Cumbria Infirmary is run by the North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust.

The centre has been in the works since before the election

It’s true that the cancer centre was planned before Boris Johnson’s October 2019 election pledge to [“build 40 new hospitals”](#) (a pledge which later became [48 new hospitals](#)).

The architect that built the new cancer centre, P+HS published [a picture](#) on its website of the building site in Carlisle showing that the 1960s tower block had “been completely flattened, making way for a new £35m oncology centre”. This was published on [17 May 2019](#).

This article is part of our work fact checking potentially false pictures, videos and stories on Facebook. You can read more about this—and find out how to report Facebook content—[here](#). For the purposes of that scheme, we’ve rated this claim as [missing context](#) because it really depends on your definition of a hospital. This is a new building for treating cancer on an existing site at an existing hospital.

by *Grace Rahman*

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