

A Health package

At last Ministers had something to say about getting waiting lists for treatment down and waiting times at A and E reduced. The fundamental principle of the NHS is free access to health care based on need. Rationing by delay is not part of the deal to taxpayers who are now paying very large sums for the service.

The NHS needs more medical capacity. It needs more GP surgery slots, more hospital beds and more operations performed. The backlogs are unacceptable. This is why I and others have been calling for a Manpower Plan. This needs to set out expectations of manageable workloads per employee and realistic targets for staff numbers needed to cope with likely demand. They also need extra to get rid of the oversized waiting lists.

This raises various questions over training, recruitment and retention. Could we introduce high standards of training in specific areas that take less time than a full doctor's qualification to staff specialist centres for cataracts, knee surgery and the other high volume standard procedures for elective surgery? Can nurses and pharmacists have more authority over prescribing and providing medicines? Can medical tests be streamlined and be more efficient?

When it comes to retaining doctors that does highlight the general tax issue where people get taxed at 60% in the £100,000 to £125,000 range, and where the allowed level of savings for pension has been cut back substantially. It would be good to ease these tax issues for all as doctors tell us they lead more to retire early when we still need their skills.

The Secretary of State yesterday announced more money to buy bedspaces in care homes to allow earlier discharge from hospital for some elderly patients. He also announced the equivalent of 7000 extra beds in the form of virtual wards where people are clinically supervised remotely by professionals whilst be in bed at home. he also announced some increase in capacity through adding modular units to allow more day care in A and E. He also proposed more work for pharmacies to cut the demands on GPs.

There is still no full workforce plan, nor stated plans to add beds with relevant staff to hospitals. As the population keeps on growing, and as an ageing population needs more hospital care the NHS does need to expand its core bed capacity.