

My Intervention in the Health and Social Care Workforce General Debate

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

I am alarmed, as my hon. Friend is, about the 9.1% annual loss of staff, which is a high loss rate by any standard and implies that something is wrong with the jobs or leadership. Do he and the Committee think that a lot more work needs to be done on job descriptions, job feasibility and support for people in their roles so that these jobs are perceived to be of greater value by people and they do not want to leave? Otherwise, we have the extra costs of training somebody new.

Steve Brine, Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee:

Yes. There is a part of the workforce plan, which the Select Committee discussed a little yesterday, which talks about how, every year, every member of staff should have a conversation with their employers about their pension arrangements and mental health and wellbeing. That is fantastic. I am sceptical as to how it is remotely possible in an organisation of this size. That does not mean that I do not think the ambition is right—I think that it is right—but it would be helpful to the House if the Minister touched on that in her wind-up.

The other point I make to my right hon. Friend, which I will also make later in my speech, is that we must remember that there are NHS employers, and ultimately the Government are the employer in the widest possible sense, but the direct employer when it comes to hospitals is the trusts, and they have a big role to play in retention and in workforce health and wellbeing. We sometimes duck away from saying that, but I say that here in the House as well as privately to the chief executive of my trust.

I am encouraged by the emphasis that the workforce plan places on prevention, which everybody knows is one of my great passions in life and politics. That will clearly be crucial, given the supply and demand challenges facing the health service at the moment. Prevention is, as colleagues know, a subject dear and close to the work of the Select Committee: we have launched a major inquiry into the prevention of ill health, with 10 workstreams. We have already done the vaccination workstream and have moved on to the healthy places—home and work—workstream. Details of that are available on the Health and Social Care Committee's website.

Let me turn to some of the specifics in the Committee's report and what action the Government have taken. One of our key recommendations was that

“the number of medical school places in the UK should be increased by 5,000 from around 9,500 per year to 14,500.”

The plan does that: it doubles medical school training places in England to 15,000 by 2031-32, which is extremely welcome.