

New management should take a fresh look at the NHS

Today the new Health Secretary will seek to focus the NHS on a new alphabet. A is for ambulance use, B is for backlogs or waiting lists, C is for transfers to care and recovery homes and D is for doctors and dentists. I wish her well in getting ambulance waiting times down, treatment waiting lists down, transfers from hospitals up and numbers of medical professionals up.

None of this can be done without learning from the mistakes of the last two years. Huge sums have been thrown at the NHS but the non covid services have suffered, with unhappy staff and too many patients in an ever growing queue. So where has all the money gone and why didn't it buy success? Just throwing more at it will not solve the problems.

Let me begin by repeating that I like many am grateful for the hard work and risks run by the teams that responded to covid before medical science knew which medicines helped and before there was a vaccine. Unfortunately the senior management refused to use the Nightingale capacity to create covid specialist hospitals. That meant many non covid wards in general hospitals were unable to work fully, leading to many other untreated conditions. Money spent on the Nightingales was written off. Large sums were also spent on taking over the capacity of private hospitals to do non covid work, only for that capacity to be too little used.

The NHS then spent a fortune on a Test and trace scheme of very variable quality which some people gamed to carry on their normal lives. This spending has now rightly been wound down.

The management needs to share its manpower plan and detailed budget with Ministers and Parliament. Ministers who take the blame need to be more engaged with the use of all the cash.