

Speech: PM speech at NHS 70 reception: 4 July 2018

I am delighted to welcome you all to Downing Street to help mark what is a very special birthday of a very special institution.

In my line of work there are not many ideas from 70 years ago that are unquestionably supported today, but that is undoubtedly the case with our National Health Service.

In a world that has changed almost beyond recognition, the vision at the heart of the NHS – of a tax-funded service that is available to all, free at the point of use with care based on clinical need and not the ability to pay – still retains near-universal acceptance.

And that tells us a lot.

Not just about the principles behind the NHS, powerful though they are.

But also about the people who, for 70 years, have turned those principles into practice on daily basis.

People like you.

There are the doctors, nurses, midwives and all the other health professionals on the front line – and the staff who support them, from porters to ward clerks to receptionists.

Across the country there are thousands of GPs, dentists, optometrists and others providing care under the NHS umbrella.

Then there are the patient advocacy groups, the volunteers, the researchers...

Many of you here today have been a part of the NHS family for 40 years or more.

That's an amazing achievement, and I know Jeremy – a man who knows a lot about long service – will be presenting you with commemorative badges to mark that later this evening.

Others among you are, through your innovations, shaping the future of the NHS and of healthcare itself.

Some of you are just setting out on what I hope will be long and rewarding careers.

Yet all of you share one common trait.

Every day, you get up and go to work so the NHS can continue to do what it has done every day for 70 years – provide the British people with some of the

best healthcare in the world.

I want that to continue.

But for that to happen we must recognise that the NHS conceived by the likes of Beveridge, Willink and Bevan was created to serve a very different country in a very different time.

Today, thanks to the NHS, people are living longer – but that brings with it an increase in dementia and other conditions associated with old age.

Childhood obesity risks burdening the next generation with a lifetime of ill-health.

And our understanding of mental health has progressed significantly – it can no longer be treated as somehow “less serious” than physical ailments.

The NHS of yesterday was simply not designed or equipped to deal with these kind of issues.

The NHS of tomorrow must be.

That’s why, last month, I set out the priorities that will guide our long-term plan for the future of our NHS.

A plan that will put the NHS on a sustainable path for generations to come.

At its heart is new investment: an extra £394 million per week in real terms by 2023/24.

But, important though that is, we all know that good healthcare is about more than money.

So I have asked the NHS itself to draw up a 10-year plan to make sure every penny of the new funding is well-spent, and that leaders are accountable for delivery.

Frontline staff like you will be involved in the plan’s development, so it delivers for patients and for the Health Service.

I know that you got into medicine and healthcare because you want to make a difference, you want to help people get better or manage their conditions.

Yet too often we see bureaucracy getting in the way of care, with process being put before patients.

So the plan will highlight what changes we could make so that you can concentrate on putting patients first.

I know that there is fantastic, innovative work going on right across the country.

That the answers to many of the challenges we face can already be found in the best of what the NHS does today, for example in bringing different teams

together to provide care closer to home.

So the plan will make it easier to share this best practice, letting everyone learn from what works and avoid what doesn't.

I know that your dedication to your work is total.

But I also know that, sometimes, you can be frustrated by staff shortages, and that you rarely enjoy the flexibility or work/life balance that many people now take for granted.

We have already removed the cap on the number of foreign doctors and nurses who can come here each year, to relieve some of the immediate pressure on staff numbers.

The plan will go further, investing in the workforce and introducing modern working practices so that the NHS is not just one of the biggest employers in the world, but also one of the best – managed in a way that works for patients and staff alike.

Finally, I know that those of you who have worked in the NHS for many years will have already seen enormous changes in medicine.

In the past 40 years alone we've heralded the arrival of synthetic human insulin, IVF and the HPV vaccine.

More change is coming.

As we stand here today, scientists are working to harness the power of genomics, Artificial Intelligence and more.

Healthcare does not stand still – and nor should the NHS.

So the plan will help the Health Service embrace the technology of tomorrow so it is fit to face the challenges of the future.

Everyone in this garden, everyone in No 10, everyone in this city and beyond will have their own story of what the NHS has done for them.

And that's because it's not the Labour Health Service or the Conservative Health Service – it is the NATIONAL Health Service.

It belongs to all of us.

It is there for all of us.

For 70 years it has been a great British achievement of which we can all be proud.

In the years to come I want to make it greater still.

And, whether you are just starting out or have already given a lifetime of service, I look forward to working with you to make that happen.