

23 June 2023

Dear Amanda

The NHS in England at 75: priorities for the future

We are delighted to enclose the report you asked the NHS Assembly to prepare ahead of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the NHS.

The report outlines the evolution of the NHS, describes where it is today, and sets out the changes we believe are needed to meet current and future challenges. It draws on the feedback of thousands of people who have contributed to a rapid process of engagement in recent weeks – known as NHS@75 engagement – with patients, staff and partners. It also draws on the huge breadth of experience within the Assembly itself.

There was clear recognition in NHS@75 engagement that, despite the best efforts of staff, the NHS is not always able to provide timely access to advice, diagnostics and treatment to all who need it. Waiting lists are at an all-time high. Public satisfaction is the lowest since the late 1990s. The NHS – and social care – faces immense challenges the like of which have rarely, if ever, been seen before. These challenges have been building in the last decade and were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, despite the huge pressures on the NHS, surveys show that the public say the NHS is what makes them most proud to be British and support for its principles remains high. The NHS has adapted to meet changing needs throughout its history and it must continue to do so in the face of risk factors such as smoking and obesity and the increased prevalence of chronic medical conditions. This means making three shifts by:

- giving greater priority to prevention
- supporting people to have more control over their care, and
- providing co-ordinated care closer to home.

To make a reality of these changes, national leaders should commit to the NHS becoming a learning and continuously improving system. This means ensuring that staff and local leaders have the time, space and support to give priority to prevention, personalised care and care closer to home. Integrated care systems must respond to the needs of their populations by building partnerships with local authorities, the voluntary and community sectors and others and tackling local as well as national priorities.

Running through the changes we have described is a golden thread: the need to see people and communities as assets with a positive contribution to make in improving health outcomes and care. Instead of being passive recipients of care, the public should play an active role in partnership with those who care for them. The goal should be to promote *shared* responsibility for health and wellbeing recognising the contribution of the NHS and other public services, the government, businesses and people themselves.

One way of taking this forward is to make use of a compact with the public setting out what people can expect of the NHS and what they in turn can contribute – the reciprocity that remains vital to the NHS and its future.

While issues to do with funding were outside the Assembly’s remit, as co-chairs we want to emphasise the need to ensure that both revenue and capital resources for the NHS are sufficient to enable staff to meet growing demand for care and that an adequately funded NHS workforce plan is published as soon as possible. For the NHS to thrive, there must also be better investment in areas critical in supporting improvements in health and care, in particular social care and public health.

There will be those who argue that the NHS is at ‘breaking point’ and changes of the kind the NHS Assembly has proposed are insufficient. We take a different view, having worked through times when the NHS has demonstrated its resilience and ability to not only recover but make substantial improvements in health outcomes and care. A lesson from these times is the need to take a long-term perspective and ensure that sufficient resources are provided to meet the needs of the population.

We take encouragement from the fact that examples of many of the changes we want to see already exist in some places. The task is to build on these innovations and support their more widespread adaptation. It is for this reason that we place so much store on the NHS becoming a learning and continuously improving system with the capabilities to share best practices and reform from within.

In a complex adaptive system such as the NHS, leaders must be agile in responding to events and adapting to challenges as they arise. In doing so, they should draw on all available assets including those of partners, patients, staff and carers. By embracing the ideas expressed in this letter and with your leadership, the journey of renewing the NHS can be accelerated now.

The NHS Assembly looks forward to working with you and colleagues in taking forward the changes we have outlined in our report.

Yours sincerely



Professor Dame Clare Gerada
Co-Chair
NHS Assembly



Professor Sir Chris Ham
Co-Chair
NHS Assembly