NHS FUNDING

Throwing money at services is not enough

Our health and social care system needs real transformation, not last-minute gap filling

The general election is an opportunity for a frank public debate on the future of our health and care system, which includes addressing the pressing issue of funding services adequately over the next few years.

But money alone is not sufficient to deal with the longer-term challenge of making the NHS sustainable. This will require the new government to support the health service to create the right conditions to cope with future challenges, such as a workforce crisis.

Recent performance and the maintenance of satisfaction levels has been delivered through the goodwill of staff. This is no longer sustainable.

European Union (EU) nationals make an important contribution to the delivery of health and care services, and their status after the UK leaves the EU is still uncertain.

The new government needs to guarantee the rights of EU nationals and reinforce the importance of being able to recruit health and care staff as part of any arrangements on immigration.

Without this reassurance, staff will continue to suffer from uncertainty, and this will make retention and recruitment more difficult during an already fragile period. We need an agreement with the EU early in the negotiations.

Releasing land

The NHS Confederation has published its own manifesto of ten proposals for the new government after the 8 June election.

The proposals include creating an NHS Homes Fund that would provide resources to support the NHS in releasing land to build new homes. This would be delivered with a view to building more homes for essential staff or improve access to assisted living accommodation.

The number of people aged over 85 is predicted to more than double over the next 20 years, to over 3.4 million, and radical action is needed now to ensure they are looked after.

The NHS Confederation is also calling for an NHS funding target linked to gross domestic product (GDP), an independent Office for Budget Responsibility for Health to provide expert advice and a £2 billion a year transformation fund.

One in eight older people in England are not getting the adult social care they need. These individuals are suffering now and the healthcare system is under enormous pressure. Finding a long-term solution to the social care crisis must be an absolute priority for the future government. Throwing money at the problem is simply not enough.

The case for funding

We believe an Office for Budget Responsibility for Health would be best placed to make the case for more health and care funding in the same way as the present Office for Budget Responsibility has for wider fiscal and economic policy.

The next government needs to commit to a funding level for health and care that is linked to GDP, as with defence and international development spending.

As the economy grows, so should health and care spending. We currently spend 10% of GDP on health and social care funding, which is well below the comparable economies of France and Germany.

The NHS Confederation is also calling for the Department of Health to be replaced by a Department of Health and Care to enable better cooperation between the two sectors.

Funding for transformation has been promised in the past two years, yet much of this has ultimately been spent on filling budget gaps. Real transformation needs a dedicated one-off fund of £2 billion a year for each of the next two years.

To read the NHS Confederation’s full manifesto go to tinyurl.com/NHS-confederation-election