

Community Nursing Healthcare Policy Update

Week ending April 28th 2017

General Election 2017

On April 22nd, the government, central and local, went into purdah. During this time public bodies are prohibited from issuing information which could be interpreted as politically biased.

Whilst manifestos are yet to be published, health and care has been heavily discussed this week;

Prime Minister's Questions

The last Prime Minister's Questions of this government took place on April 26th.

- Jeremy Corbyn argued "*The NHS has not got the money it needs – the PM knows that*"
- Theresa May reported that half of NHS staff will see a pay increase of approximately 4% as a result of promotions
- Jeremy Corbyn presented a question from a woman "*frightened about the future of the NHS*". Theresa May responded; "*The NHS is treating more patients than it ever had before, we're seeing more people having operations, more doctors, more nurses, more midwives, more GPs and record levels of funding*".

Labour's pledge to NHS staff

The Labour party has declared that "*this election is about the future of the NHS*" and launched a three-point pledge for NHS staff:

- **Better pay:** The 1% pay cap will be scrapped and pay decisions will be put into the hands of an independent pay review body
- **Fully funded training:** Training bursaries will be re-introduced
- **Safe staffing levels:** Legislation will ensure safe staff levels in England's NHS.

Responses to the pledge:

- Health Minister, Phillip Dunne (Conservative) argued that Labour's "*nonsensical economic policies*" put the health service at risk. He stressed the importance of strong, stable leadership in securing a growing economy and in turn, funding for the NHS.
- Norman Lamb MP (Liberal Democrats) raised concerns over the proposed source of funding Labour will use to alleviate financial pressures in the NHS.

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Corporation tax has been highlighted as a source of funding for approximately ten other policies.

- Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, said cutting student bursaries was a difficult decision but it would make funds available to train more nurses – courses currently have two applicants for every place. Over the next few years a record number of nurses will be trained and working on wards to relieve hospital pressures.
- The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) said *“nurses’ pay packets have been cut by 14% in real-terms and so ‘more must be done to help them catch up’ ... fully funded training to continue to attract the best and brightest into the profession ... we call on all parties to step up and commit to the long-term funding that patients and services need”*.
- The Nuffield Trust said *“It’s good to see staffing issues recognised by Labour as one of the biggest challenges currently facing the NHS, and active steps promised to address them ... However, both these pledges potentially come with significant price tags for which Labour will have to commit extra funding, or else the NHS simply won’t be able to afford the staff it already has”*.
- The British Medical Association (BMA) said *“NHS staff will be encouraged by this understanding of the damaging impact on their morale from the years of real-term pay cuts and ongoing pay restraint that have led to vacant posts, understaffing and rota gaps ... Tackling the issue head on is absolutely vital if we are to prove the NHS that delivers the high-quality care patients deserve”*.
- The Health Foundation reiterated the current concerns around pay and a dwindling workforce. *“The situation is not sustainable if the quality of NHS services is to be protected. It also puts nurses under increasing stress and strain”*.

UKIP General Election campaign launched

Paul Nuttall, leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) paid attention to the NHS at UKIPs election campaign launch:

- *“We will have a clear commitment to slash a foreign aid budget that is costing the British tax payer in the region of £30m every single day. We will redirect the money saved into our NHS”*.
- *“Under UKIP the NHS will remain the public hands and free at the point of delivery. We will also ensure that the National Health Service is not an international health service”*.

Election Manifestos

The Royal College of GPs (RCGP) published their election manifesto, ‘Six Steps for Safer General Practice’, in which they call for:

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- The delivery of the *GP Forward View* in England
- An increase in the general practice workforce, including more medical students choosing general practice and more support to retain GPs
- The safeguarding of general practice and healthcare professionals during Brexit negotiations
- The growth of the wider general practice team. Increasing the number of mental health therapists and pharmacists in surgeries and attracting more nurses through a national return to practice scheme
- The development of a long-term and sustainable plan to reduce the cost of indemnity insurance
- Increasing GP training to a minimum of four years to ensure GPs have the skills needed to deal with increasingly complex needs.

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine (RCEM) published their manifesto, 'Emergency care: challenge and solutions'. In addition to highlighting the challenges the NHS' emergency workforce face in meeting demand and the complex health needs of an ageing and growing population, they called for the following;

- An increased workforce who have the skills and training needed to safely and effectively treat patients
- More hospital beds to tackle exit blocking
- An improved provision of social care and community care
- The development of a robust and practical workforce plan.

Voters' trust

An opinion poll for *The Telegraph* has found that, when it comes to which party is best trusted with the NHS, public opinion is shifting towards the Conservative party. Previous election campaigns saw Labour enjoy a double-digit lead. However, the recent poll found 40% of voters are confident in Labour's ability to manage the health service, whilst 38% thought the same for the Conservatives.

Brexit

Boris Johnson, Foreign Secretary, appeared on ITV's '*Good Morning Britain*' standing by Vote Leave's '*we send the EU £350 million a week let's fund our NHS instead*' campaign message – "*[Its] £350 million a week which we do not currently control which could be spent on our priorities, including the NHS*".

Michael Gove MP spoke on BBC Radio 5 Live: "*I am absolutely convinced that we will be spending significantly more on the NHS [after Brexit]. I hope its £100 million*".

Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, has revealed that Brexit negotiations and good outcomes from these are "*absolutely critical*" to the future of health and social care. Further details are due to be announced in the Conservative party's manifesto.

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NHS statistics

NHS England announced it will publish its monthly statistics on June 8th. This means that, unless the date is altered, the NHS will be a significant news story on the day voters head to the polls.

Allocation of the A&E capital funds

The Department of Health has allocated just over half (£55.98 million) of the £100 million A&E funding announced in the Spring Budget 2017. 70 hospitals have received funds, with this used ensure 95% of patients are admitted, transferred or discharged within four hours and ascertain that patients are treated in the appropriate setting.

Digitalising the NHS

Digital Health Intelligence has reported that the 2020 target for all NHS hospitals to be paperless will not be met. Instead, it is predicted the target will be met in 2027 at the earliest.

Whilst progress has been made in utilising some systems, the uptake of more complex clinical systems, which have significant potential in improving patient safety, has been slow. The reasons for this delayed progression have cited repeated shortfalls and delays in national NHS IT funding, along with ageing IT infrastructure still used in many trusts.

MPs pass the sugar tax

Amendments to the Finance Bill, which includes legislation to enable the Soft Drinks Industry Levy to be introduced in April 2018 (drinks with more than 8g of sugar per 100ml will face a higher rate of tax), have been approved by MPs.

Nursing shortage in children's hospices is impacting care

Together for Short Lives surveyed 25 children's hospices and have found the average nurse vacancy was 11%, higher than the 9% overall NHS nurse vacancy rate, equating to more than 130 unfilled positions. In addition, nursing posts in hospices were reported as being more difficult to fill, with 65% being vacant for more than three months and 25% over a year.

With the number of nurse falling and the number of children relying on hospices increasing, services are cutting back on vital palliative care provided to families. 17% of hospices reported they were closing beds, whilst 13% were hindered in their ability to provide 24/7 care.

Evaluation of GP Forward View in England

The British Medical Association (BMA) published an evaluation of the progress made on the GP Forward View, a year after its launch; "... *whilst there has been some delivery, there have been cases where promised funding has been severely delayed or distributed*

unevenly across the county". The BMA cite this as being confusing and a deficient implementation, especially considering the increasing pressures on general practice.

"We expect politicians of all parties to put forward positive, well-resourced proposals that will not duck the crisis facing the NHS and general practice in the upcoming general election campaign".

Increase in the number of young children and babies admitted to hospital in an emergency

QualityWatch published a report which found that, over the past decade, the number of young children and babies admitted to hospital in an emergency had increased by a third. There are also a growing number of children admitted for potentially preventable conditions such as tonsillitis and asthma. This raises concerns as to where this group can access high quality treatment, aside from hospitals emergency care.

Between 2006/7 to 2015/16 the number of emergency hospital admissions of under 25s increased by 14%, with babies and very young children (under four) being the most significant increase – 30% and 28% respectively.

GPs are missing cancer symptoms

A study has found that 71% of patients diagnosed with cancer in A&E had consulted their GP in regards to their symptoms. 41% of these patients had seen their GP at least three times, whilst 59% once or twice.

NHS ambulance services

The Public Accounts Committee produced a report on the ambulance service. Since 2011 the increase in funding and service provided by ambulance trusts has been unable to keep up with increasing demand.

- Ambulance trusts have adopted behaviour to meet response-time targets, overlooking the provision of the most appropriate response
- The causes of variations in ambulance service performance and efficiency is not fully comprehended. NHS Improvement should identify the causes in performance and provide operating framework which balances universality and flexibility
- There is ambiguity over how ambulance services will be integrated in Sustainability and Transformation Plans
- Staff shortages are concerning. Ambulance services are having difficulty in attracting and retaining staff, with many trusts reported significant sickness rates.

Implications of Brexit on health and social care

The House of Commons, Health Committee produced a report on the implications of Brexit on health and care stakeholders, be it employees or patients.

- There are concerns over the preparation and negotiation of Brexit.
 - The Department of Health is urged to ensure that there are sufficient members of staff working on Brexit
 - The government must liaise more broadly with external stakeholders
 - The government should put health at the core of British negotiating priorities, drawing upon expertise and involving ministers/officials in negotiations.
- There are concerns about the impact Brexit is having on R-EU (remaining members of the European Union) staff's morale and the undetermined changes they may face. Challenges in applying for permanent UK residency and overcoming bureaucratic hurdles are contributing to diminishing morale.
 - The government should ensure the best staff from around the world are able to be recruited and retained in health and social care
 - The government should ensure the value of health and social workers on lower pay is acknowledged.
- Brexit will have implications on people reliant on the EU's reciprocal healthcare arrangements.
 - Both sides of the negotiations should resolve and prioritise the existing rights of all UK nationals residing in the R-EU and all R-EU nationals residing the UK.

Integrating health and social care

The Public Accounts Committee produced a report on integrating health and social care. Given the failure of the Better Care Fund, a government initiative to integrate health and social care, integration should be delivered within the context of sustainability and transformation planning.

- It is not known what the most efficient balance of funding across health and social care is
- The Better Care fund is redundant as a way of paving the way for integration through the sustainability and transformation planning process
- The government should set feasible targets to integration initiatives
- Departments and NHS England have relinquished any responsibility for the Better Care Fund
- Sustainability and transformation planning has not been as clear or inclusive as it should have been.

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