



Craig Whittaker MP

CALDER VALLEY

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Response to 'Humanitarian Crisis' in the NHS – January 2017

Thank you for contacting me about the NHS.

I believe in the NHS and its values. I recognise that the NHS has been under sustained pressure with the number of people aged over 80 rising by 340,000, and life expectancy rising by 12 months in the last six years alone. As a result, the NHS is facing an unprecedented demand. However, I know that the Government is determined to protect the service through an extremely challenging period and ensure its future sustainability.

This winter, the NHS has made more extensive preparations than ever before and there are now 11,400 more doctors and 11,200 more hospital nurses in the NHS since 2010. To support the NHS, investment of £350 million was included in local Clinical Commissioning Group budgets in 2016/17 for resilience planning, and £50 million was made available for national initiatives. The NHS also assured the winter plans of every trust, launched the largest ever flu vaccination programme and bolstered support outside A&Es, with 12,000 additional GP sessions offered over the festive period.

As a consequence of this preparation and, most importantly, the hard work of frontline staff, the system overall is coping and even performing slightly better than last year. Earlier in December, it treated a record number of patients within four hours and we are seeing 2,500 more patients within the four hour standard every single day compared with 2010.

However, I am aware that there are a number of trusts where the situation has been extremely fragile and NHS England is considering a series of further measures to be taken forward on a temporary basis at the discretion of local clinical leaders. Taken together, these actions will give the NHS additional flexibility to take further measures if appropriate at a local level.

Despite tight public finances, the Government has actively supported the NHS' own plan for the future. That is why it is providing the additional £10 billion of investment per annum in real terms by 2020/21 - compared to 2014/15 – requested to fund a transformation in care. I know that the Government recognises the current pressures facing local areas. That is why the Government is giving local authorities additional funding and flexibility so that they will have access to an additional £3.5 billion by 2020, providing a real terms increase in social care funding by the end of this Parliament.

The Government is committed to maintaining and delivering the vital four hour A&E standard to patients. It is widely understood that too many people are going to A&E unnecessarily, and therefore we must look at ways to protect the four hour target for people who need it most. This will be done through triaging more people at the 'front doors' and pointing them towards more appropriate services, as well as giving more information to the public so they can make the right decisions about the services they need to access.

I can assure you that the Government remains committed to ensuring that the NHS offers the safest, highest-quality care available anywhere in the world.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Craig Whittaker', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Craig Whittaker MP