

Social Care

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health Committee

It is a pleasure to follow Dr Whitford and I particularly commend her comments on the importance of prevention, which we must not forget. I join the Minister in paying tribute to the wider care and health workforce, and of course the many unpaid family carers for all that they do. I would like to touch on the forthcoming consultation and some of the current and future challenges. If hon. Members will forgive me, I will take very few interventions because I know that many are waiting to speak.

On the consultation, the Health Committee yesterday had the pleasure of hearing from members of the House of Lords Committee on the Long-term Sustainability of the NHS on the subject of the long-term sustainability of the NHS and social care. They started out with the remit of talking about the NHS, but rapidly realised that the two systems are completely inseparable and that we have to stop considering health and social care in separate silos. The Minister will hear overwhelmingly from the people who contribute to the consultation that we cannot keep thinking of these systems in isolation, so right from the outset will she make it a consultation on the sustainable future funding of both health and social care?

One thing that we heard loud and clear from members of the Lords Committee yesterday was that we need to do more about future planning and that the system for this has been dismal for decades. Their recommendation was that we should set up an office for health and care sustainability that gives us all good-quality, reliable data about not only the demographic challenges but the future needs of both systems so that we can plan ahead for the costs we face in a realistic manner.

Too often in this House we have very divisive debates on this issue, and the challenges in funding future health and care costs are so enormous that I fear the only way we will meet them is by those on both Front Benches and all Members across the House agreeing that we need to work jointly to reach solutions, because no political party has a monopoly on good ideas. Particularly in a hung Parliament, where it is very difficult for us to pass primary legislation, the only way we will move forward on behalf of the people we all represent—“we all want the best for them”—is if the solutions are worked towards jointly across the House. I hope all Members will move forward in this debate in a spirit of co-operation, because we have to fund this properly. I am afraid that there is a funding gap, although I absolutely welcome the Â£2 billion that has been pledged. There is consensus that by the time we reach 2019-20, we will face an estimated funding gap, despite the uplift, of more than Â£2 billion. That will have a real impact on all those we represent.

We must fund this properly not just now, in the short term, but in the long term, and we must come forward with solutions, but it is not just about funding. It is about staffing, and planning properly for a wider workforce across health and social care, so I very much hope that that will also be included in the consultation. Unless we plan ahead for our future workforce, we will always be playing catch-up, as we do at the moment. Of course, we have seen many important changes. In the future, for example, healthcare assistants will be able to train to

move forward through the apprenticeship route to become nursing associates and on into degree nursing. We know from Camilla Cavendish's review that it is not just about pay in the sector but the lack of continuing professional development and training opportunities and, in particular, the inability to rotate through the NHS and social care community settings. That gives an example of how the Government are making some positive moves, which I welcome.

I hope that from the start the consultation will cover both health and social care and that the Minister will go further in covering not just the sleep-in crisis but some of the many other issues that affect my constituents. For example, some are having their assessments re-examined, and disabled young adults facing a change in the support that will be available to them. I hope that the Minister will meet me to discuss some of the issues raised by my constituents in Kingsbridge who face significant changes to their care.

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