

NHS Winter Crisis

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons)

I join the Minister in thanking NHS staff and in commenting that there is nothing new about winter pressures in the NHS. What is different is that they are extending now into traditionally quieter months, and that the depth of those pressures is so much more profound over the current winter, because there has been a failure over successive Governments to plan sufficiently for the scale of the increased demand across both health and social care. Will the Minister think about the forthcoming Green Paper for social care and think about combining it with health, so that we can see this as a truly across-system approach? I would also like to reiterate the points made by Dr Whitford about the role of bed-occupancy levels. Can the Minister tell us what the current bed-occupancy levels are in the NHS in England?

Philip Dunne The Minister of State, Department of Health

On the last point, I can confirm to my hon. Friend that, at Christmas eve, the bed occupancy rate was 84.2%, below the target of 85% that we set going into this particular winter period. Of course the rate fluctuates daily and I do not have the figures for the most recent days. We did at least start this holiday period in that position, which is a great tribute to the work done in preparing for winter. I wish to reiterate to her, as I did to my right hon. and learned Friend, the importance of the integration work being done through the sustainability and transformation partnership process between NHS organisations and social care providers. It is part of the solution for the longer-term arrangements that we need to put in place to try to make sure that people who are living longer live better, more healthily and in a more independent way out of hospital.

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