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THE BMJ COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF THE NHS

A manifesto for a healthier NHS, a healthier UK

The BMJ's commissioners on the future of the NHS set out their manifesto of what they would do if they were in government

1. Reaffirm commitment to the founding principles of the NHS

This new government will reaffirm its commitment to the founding principles of the NHS, promising a comprehensive health service, funded centrally and free at the point of need, and available to all equally on the basis of clinical need. We add a commitment to transparency and accountability and a promise to work with staff, patients, and the public to improve our health service.

This government will seek to rebuild the trust and confidence in the NHS that has been lost in the past decade. Patients must be able to trust that the NHS, and the people and teams who work in it, will be there when they need it, that ambulance and emergency services will be responsive, and that there are staff and facilities to treat them. Doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals have lost trust in the good intentions of those with authority over them, whether that is their local employers, integrated care boards, NHS authorities, professional regulators such as the General Medical Council, or the royal colleges. We need a renewed commitment for systemic change and a focus on creating the conditions needed to rebuild the supportive and respectful relationships that are necessary to restore the NHS.

The NHS was founded to provide equal access for all patients. We recognise the extent and impact of health inequalities, the unfairness of these, and the vital role of government policy in tackling them. We reaffirm the importance of equity both for patients and for staff, recognising the need to end the disadvantages and discrimination faced by many as a result of many factors including poverty, racism, and sexism.

2. Establish an independent Office for NHS Policy and Budgetary Responsibility

This government will take an evidenced based approach to investment in the NHS and establish an independent Office for NHS Policy and Budgetary Responsibility for England to provide unbiased, robust reports on health and healthcare. We will create a five year strategic plan for the NHS, supported by a detailed financial settlement and a provisional settlement over five to 10 years. This will include an immediate cash injection to start to recover the £32bn shortfall in funding which occurred over the decade to 2020, and to help tackle the current

NHS crisis, especially the surgery backlog, the mental health crisis, and access to primary care.

This government will invest in general practice, enabling a return to continuity of care between GPs and patients as the evidence shows that this is effective both in improving health and reducing expenditure. While recognising the contributions of a variety of healthcare workers, we will ensure that down-skilling and replacement of doctors by less highly trained personnel is reversed.

We will promote a system of genuine partnerships with patients and the public to design care that fits their needs, aiming to achieve a joined up service with clear and timely communication with patients and between staff, underpinned by well functioning and up-to-date information technology. There will be no major restructuring, but strategic work will be undertaken from the ground up using expertise from patients, clinicians, and managers to develop a responsive service.

3. Fully implement a fit for purpose workforce strategy

This government will restore pay to match 2008 levels. This will raise morale, bolster the workforce, and resolve the doctors' strikes. We need to train more doctors, nurses and other healthcare staff. We will focus on creating the right conditions to retain staff, which means ensuring psychologically safe workplaces, and improvements in respect, dignity, and working conditions, as well as adequate pay. Workforce planning must involve not only the recruitment of staff and education up to qualification, but also consider higher professional training and equitable and fairer career opportunities. We recognise the impact of Brexit and hostile immigration policies on the healthcare workforce. Any recruitment from other countries must be ethical, with consideration of the impact on the nations that trained them. Those recruited along with their families must receive access to healthcare and other services. We will underpin the clinical competence of NHS staff with ongoing education, but also capacity to conduct first class research and access to appropriate funding, of which the NHS has a proud tradition.

The shortage of social care staff leads to misery and indignity for vulnerable people, as well as having knock-on effects on hospital capacity. In the short term this government will restore the right for carers coming from overseas to bring their families. In the longer term, we will improve the pay, training, and

career structure of carers so that it becomes an attractive choice for many.

4. Tackle public health and environmental challenges

Recognising the harms of alcohol, tobacco, gambling, and junk food, the government will use the fiscal and regulatory levers at its disposal to minimise exposure of our population to these harms, in line with the public's desire for stronger government action to tackle these issues.

The climate crisis is the biggest threat to our health. Fossil fuels must stay in the ground and every policy will be judged on its effect on the environment, considering greenhouse gases, biodiversity, nature, and pollution. Within the NHS, we will implement interventions to improve sustainability across infrastructure, technology, transport, food, and waste. We will be unwavering in our support of the national ambition to deliver the world's first net zero health service.

Tackling both public health and environmental agendas, this government will promote active transport, improving infrastructure for cycling and walking and promoting train travel while removing incentives for air and road travel.

Food and housing insecurity is a major cause of poor physical and mental health. Welfare benefits will be set at a level that affords individuals and families a decent standard of living. Housing policy will be rebalanced to give renters more security and to provide more truly affordable social housing. This government will acknowledge the vast existing evidence on the importance of the social determinants of health, enacting evidence based policies such as removing the two child benefit cap and increasing universal credit. Currently the UK has some of the worst figures internationally on increasing child poverty rates, which has effects on children's health, their futures, and the future of this country: it will be our priority to cut child poverty in our first year of office.

We will restore funding to NHS dentistry so that adequate dental care is available to all, particularly children, young people, and older populations.

Together we can build a better health and social care system that thrives on collaboration, not competition. There are efficiencies to be found, but this government understands fully that the transformations we look for will require investment.

Health is central to our nation's financial prosperity and wellbeing, and this needs to start in the very early years of a child's life: investing in health will improve peoples' lives and makes sound economic sense.

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