

Evidence for LSE-Lancet Commission 'The Future of the NHS'

Name of Organisation/Individual: Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

Name and Job Title of person/s submitting evidence: Dr Deepak Dwarakanath, Vice President

Role organisation/individual plays within the NHS?

The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh ("the College") was founded in 1681. We support and educate doctors in the hospital sector throughout the UK and the world with over 12,000 Fellows and Members in 91 countries, covering 30 medical specialties.

Our UK Fellows and Members work across the NHS in the four nations, with more than 50% in the NHS in England. The College is committed to promoting the highest clinical standards and the implementation of robust, evidence-based medical practice to ensure the highest quality of care for patients.

From your/organisation's perspective what are the biggest challenges facing the NHS in the immediate future and also looking forward over the next 20 years?

The College would highlight several areas which pose challenges to the NHS across the UK: funding; the structure and governance of the NHS; workforce recruitment and retention; and Brexit. The NHS has faced intense pressures and challenges in recent years. These were exacerbated during the winter of 2017/18 when the combination of cold weather and a significant increase in cases of flu made care more complex. NHS staff have worked exceptionally hard and it is important that we support them through such demanding periods, and beyond. It is vital that NHS leaders and government learn from what have been particularly challenging times, to ensure that the system is better equipped to deal with extreme circumstances in future. This would ultimately benefit patients, but also overworked NHS staff who need to feel valued for their dedication and hard work.

As the NHS turns 70 this year, the College sees an opportunity to reflect and to think about the future of how we deliver healthcare in England, and in the devolved nations. Decades of reform in the NHS in England have resulted in a very complex management system plagued by many costly initiatives that are not based on evidence and do not have a clear strategic plan.

Persistent change in the NHS has produced an over complex management and the College feels it is time to declutter the NHS structures and focus on the job in hand – patient care. It is time for a radical rethink to streamline these initiatives and address the unprecedented challenges that are impacting on the workforce and, ultimately, on patients. We have therefore called on the UK Government to implement measures to simplify the complex NHS landscape in England and for the NHS in Scotland to be prepared to take risks, and be more innovative when tackling challenges and planning for the future.

The College welcomes the announcement by UK Prime Minister, Theresa May MP, that the NHS in England will receive £20bn extra a year by 2023, compared with today's figure (£114bn a year). This would help to address the problems associated with annual top-ups of the NHS budget and perhaps even depoliticise the NHS to some extent – something which we have called for in our [Future for the NHS in Scotland](#) document which we published with the Good Governance Institute. We believe a move to longer term strategic funding will certainly allow better planning.

Workforce planning needs a clear strategic direction to tackle the recruitment and retention issues that exist. There are workforce shortages across the country with rota gaps creating additional pressures in an already difficult environment. We must value healthcare professionals at every stage in their careers to ensure medicine remains an attractive career choice and offer support for medical professionals as they progress throughout their careers.

Much remains to be clarified about the impact of Brexit on issues such as our NHS workforce; research; freedom of movement; medicines; and implications for public health. Given the current shortfalls being experienced in staffing in both the health and social care sectors, the UK Government must also value the role of EU nationals as Brexit negotiations continue, as well as recognising the contribution made to our NHS from healthcare professionals from other overseas countries. The College calls on the UK Government to ensure that the voice of all medical professionals is recognised by policy makers at the heart of these negotiations.

What innovative solutions has your organisation trialled to address these challenges and what was your experience regarding their effectiveness?

The College makes a number of recommendations to address the challenges described previously. Whilst we acknowledge the funding challenges that the NHS faces, we believe that by rethinking the approach to focus on long-term and sustainable solutions, we can achieve a world-class workforce delivering the best possible patient care safely. In that regard, we believe that doctors – and indeed other health professionals - must be given a greater say in addressing how money is spent within the service. That is why we will continue to call for a working group to be set up, to act as a link between the Government and the clinicians, health experts and managers who are leading the NHS. This would also allow the Royal Colleges and others to feed into discussions about the different pressures that the NHS is under.

This group would be briefed to find solutions to alleviate the pressures faced across the NHS, and would be consulted on any multi-year funding settlement for the NHS. Our Fellows and Members are vastly experienced in developing healthcare solutions, and the College urges government to draw on their knowledge and expertise. All healthcare initiatives must have strong evidence to support them, be thoroughly evaluated for outcome, and lead to solid and sustainable improvements in the long term, particularly as we move towards further integration of health and social care.

A joint report by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and the Good Governance Institute has been published, which sets out five radical recommendations for the future of healthcare in Scotland. The report, entitled the [Future for the NHS in Scotland](#), follows a debate which took place in autumn 2017 at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, which brought together

health professionals and non-medical experts from a wide range of organisations. The experts agreed that healthcare in Scotland is facing some significant challenges, and that there is an urgent requirement for radical action.

They established that the health system in Scotland must be prepared to take risks, and be more innovative when tackling challenges and planning for the future. The report recommends: stronger health and social care integration with joint financial arrangements; a new political agreement to “de-politicise” integrated healthcare; creating a public platform for more active public engagement focusing on the true cost of healthcare and the public’s essential role in the future design of health and social care; shifting the balance of care, informed by policy based on evidence, with a series of clear, collective outcomes underpinned by strong governance structures; introduce new technologies with evidence-based implementation approaches, better supported and managed nationally.

In particular, the College thinks that attention must be given to the importance of governance as a means to deliver step change. Governance accountability is an area where more progress can be made, and the College wants to see this shared better across health and social care.

Workforce planning needs a clear strategic direction to address recruitment and retention issues. Investment in our current and future workforce is essential to create a culture where colleagues have the time to care, time to train and the time to research. We must ensure we have a world-class clinical workforce that values the role of EU nationals during and post Brexit negotiations. We must retain high quality training programmes and value our junior doctors to ensure the UK remains an attractive place to train and work.

The College calls on the UK Government to ensure that the voice of all medical professionals is recognised by policy makers and we will continue to push for the best Brexit deal for our NHS, and for the hard working healthcare professionals who form its backbone, and to ensure that the UK remains as engaged with the global health economy as we are currently.

Any other issues your organisation wishes to highlight to our commission?

The College has no additional comments at this time.