Crisis means crisis, Theresa May - and it's caused by underfunding and ignorance

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Brexit means Brexit?

Fair enough, Mrs May. I'll tell you something else though. Crisis means crisis.

There was widespread rebuttal from the Government when the British Red Cross described the current situation within the NHS as a 'humanitarian crisis'.

One could debate the terminology used for hours, but the point remains that the NHS is in a deep crisis. And our political leaders won't face up to it.

Many will brush this aside. "Every year we're told there's another crisis in the NHS' they'll say.

'It doesn't work anymore; the system was designed for a post-war era."

I'd like to think we in the NHS have more of a can-do attitude, and would suggest the NHS will only fail if it is left to do so.

The politics of healthcare is complex, and I am not a politician. But the problem really seems a rather straightforward one to grasp.

An ageing population brings with it more complex health needs. Many of these are best addressed in the community and not in an acute hospital bed. But most of our community beds have been closed, so as a GP there will be nowhere for me to send my frail 85 year old patient who has had a fall at home and can no longer cope.

Maybe, in Theresa May's utopian 'Shared Society', she envisages these problems will just disappear. Perhaps she thinks others will shoulder the burden of a collapsing welfare state, so she can concentrate on how hard she intends to Brexit. I don't know.

All I see, all any of us in healthcare see, are the effects of cuts in social care. Those corridors lined with trolleys are usually inhabited not by 'blotto' timewasters, but by the frail and increasingly elderly in our society who have reached a tipping point.

Many have complex health problems, but often they don't need a long stay in hospital to sort out their immediate medical problems. The problem once they have been admitted (because there is a dearth of suitable community services) is that we then cannot safely discharge them home.

This is usually because a 'Package of Care' is like gold-dust, and takes weeks to arrange. So then the vulnerable in our society are given the inappropriate label 'bed blockers', as if the onus is somehow on them to do something about it.

So naturally, you might think, the solution would be to create more beds. An increasing burden of admissions surely requires more capacity?

Apparently not, if the last 30 years are anything to go by. In 1987 there were over 297,000 beds available in England.

By 2015, this number was just 130,000. This is a drop of about 56%.

Even more worrying is the drop in mental health beds, down from 67,000 beds in 1987 to 19000 in 2015.

It is hard to take seriously the sincerity of the Prime Minister's pledges this week to improve Mental Health standards when England has lost over 70% of its mental health beds in less than 30 years.

The decline has been over successive Tory and Labour governments, undeniably, but it should be noted the cuts and bed losses have been far more savage while the Conservatives have resided in Number 10.

In 2014 the UK had 273 hospital beds per 100,000 population. Compare this to Germany (823 beds per 100,000 population) and even Greece (424 per 100,000) one immediately begins to realise the absolute unremitting pressure on the system, and how frustrating and maddening it is when Mr Hunt and Mrs May refuse to acknowledge the issues staring them squarely in the face.

How can we deliver the level of care we strive to give when we are up against this day in, day out? It is surely an embarrassment that the sixth wealthiest nation in the world offers its citizens healthcare free at the point of access but increasingly devoid of any dignity or human touch.

Jeremy Hunt has time and again proven he does not have the leadership skills or trust to take the NHS forward. He now commands no respect, and this is now a critical issue in the wider NHS argument.

Simply offering his 'thanks' to all the NHS staff who worked over the festive period is really not enough given how abysmally he has treated us in recent months.

The NHS cannot run on goodwill alone, and if he expects it to he should at least have the common decency to listen to our sincere concerns. Instead, Mr Hunt runs away from every doctor or reporter that dares challenge him.

The Health Secretary has blamed our packed Emergency Departments on patients, on doctors, on the previous government, in fact he has looked to shift the blame to just about everyone so that he doesn't shoulder it himself.

Branded an 'excellent' Secretary of State by the Prime Minister in 2016, one really does wonder what he would have to do to receive a 'could do better' report.

Jeremy Hunt said in the House of Commons on 9th January that we 'need to have an honest discussion with the public' about the NHS. This was met with cries of 'what do you think we have been trying to do for the last 2 years?!' from most Junior Doctors.

So, Mr Hunt, it's time for that talk. The person that needs to be honest is you. We have been brutally honest.

Doctors and nurses in most hospitals across the country are telling you we are failing patients despite our best efforts. We will not accept your claims that this crisis amounts to a 'few isolated cases'.

This is systemic. Patients are waiting hours for ambulances, days for hospital beds and weeks for a GP appointment.

People are needlessly dying. Misuse of A&E departments is not the critical factor here, nor are immigrants or alcoholics.

The real problem is chronic underfunding and wilful ignorance, and as advocates for our patients we are not going to stop shouting about this. They deserve much, much better.