

Theresa May Has Caused Mayhem In Our NHS. As A Doctor, I've Experienced It First Hand

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A year ago, Theresa May's government took control of our NHS. [Figures released by NHS England](#) today show the literal mayhem that has engulfed our health service under May's premiership, and the harm this is causing patients. As a junior doctor, I experience it every day.

In the first hospital I worked in, I thought the lack of resources, understaffing, and inability to meet patient demand was particular to that hospital trust. But as I moved from one hospital to another, I realised it has become endemic. Overflowing A&E departments, routine cancellation of operations, ambulance delays, and permanent bed shortages are the new norm in Tory Britain.

Today's figures evidence how much the situation has deteriorated in the last year. Over four million people are currently waiting for surgery, the highest number in a decade and, in the last year, 2.5 million people waited more than four hours for emergency and urgent treatment.

The Conservatives' lethal cuts to funding, combined with the selling off services for private profit and a social care crisis caused in Downing Street, has pushed our NHS to breaking point. This has drastically reduced the quality of patient care, and shut many out from treatment altogether, often with fatal consequences. It's clear that cutting services to the bone has become more than just a metaphor.

Patients have also been impacted by the government's mistreatment of NHS staff. This was the year I and other junior doctors were forced to take the unprecedented step of striking in opposition to an unsafe contract. Jeremy Hunt imposed the contracts anyway, ignoring our warnings about threats to patient care.

And despite widespread pressure to end the public sector pay cap, our wages continue to fall in real-terms. This has hit the lowest paid staff the hardest, with some of my colleagues forced to rely on foodbanks as a result. Low pay, combined with the removal of the nurses' bursary and rising fees for medical students, has caused a recruitment crisis and severe staffing shortages.

An overstretched and underpaid workforce, without access to sufficient resources and facilities, cannot provide patients with the care they need. Our inability to provide this care causes us severe stress, strain and sleep deprivation, which has driven many of my colleagues from the profession.

Today's figures should be a wake-up call for us to fight for universal healthcare, properly funded and publicly-owned, with safe staffing levels and fair pay. Not only are NHS services and staff being pushed to breaking point - now patients are too. If we don't act now, the consequences will be fatal.

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Surgery waiting numbers highest in decade, says NHS England

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The number of people waiting for routine surgery in England is at its

highest level for a decade, figures from NHS England show.

It is estimated more than four million people were waiting for operations in June - a figure last seen in 2007.

The rise is partly because of growing demand and the NHS performing more procedures.

But some doctors argue the higher numbers reflect growing strain on the health service.

The NHS in England is failing to meet its target to operate on 92% of people within 18 weeks.

- **You'll wait longer for ops, says NHS boss**
- **Life on an NHS waiting list: Peter's story**

Since June last year there has been an increase of more than 21% in the numbers waiting longer than 18 weeks to 373,182.

NHS England said: "Last month 1.4 million patients started consultant-led treatment, and more than nine out of 10 patients were waiting less than 18 weeks.

"We're working hard to cut long waits, and the number of patients waiting over a year for treatment has dropped by nearly 13,000 since March 2011 to being just over 1,500 now."

The confirmed figures shows that 3.83 million people are waiting to have surgery, but missing data means the NHS believes the figure may in fact be "just over four million patients".

Other targets missed include the four-hour target in A&E and urgent referrals for cancer care.

John Appleby, the director of research at the Nuffield trust, said: "These figures show that the NHS continues to be systematically unable to meet its main targets.

"This puts the NHS on the back foot as we approach winter, with problems both at the 'front door' of A&E departments and at the 'back door', as hospitals struggle to send people home or onto further care."

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NHS operations: Waiting times to rise in 'trade-off', boss says

By Nick Trigg
Health correspondent

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'We're committed to quick operations on the NHS' - NHS England boss Simon Stevens

Patients will face longer waits for operations such as knee and hip replacements in a "trade-off" for improved care in other areas, NHS England boss Simon Stevens says.

He said growing pressures meant he could no longer guarantee treatment in the 18-week target time.

GPs will also have to cut the number of patients they refer to hospital and use alternatives such as physio instead.

But Mr Stevens said in return there would be quicker cancer and A&E care.

■ **'Pragmatic strategy' for NHS England**

Mr Stevens was unveiling a progress report on his five-year strategy for the health service, launched in 2014.

He said demand was rising at a quicker rate than expected and so compromises had to be made.

"There is a trade-off here - we do expect there will be some marginal lengthening of waiting lists, but this will still represent a strong, quick experience compared to 10 years ago, let alone 20."

But Clare Marx, president of the Royal College of Surgeons in England, said the delays could have more serious consequences.

"Our concern is not only for hip and knee patients but those patients who perhaps are waiting for heart surgery. They may have a heart attack whilst they are waiting," she said.

Are you waiting for an operation or cancer care? Have you waited in A&E? Get in touch by emailing haveyoursay@bbc.co.uk.





How long will patients have to wait?

Patients waiting for a hospital operation are meant to be seen within 18 weeks.

But there are currently more than 360,000 patients on the waiting list who have waited longer than that, which is one in 10 of the total - a proportion that has almost doubled in four years.

Mr Stevens said he expected that to get worse over the next couple of years but it needed to be seen in context of the situation a decade ago, when nearly half of patients were waiting longer than 18 weeks.

Niall Dickson, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, which represents NHS trusts, said: "I think it is completely unreasonable to expect NHS services to provide everything when the restrictions on funding and the demand is rising all the time."

To reduce waiting lists, GPs are being asked to look at how many patients they are referring to hospital - and whether other options, such as physiotherapy, would be more appropriate than operations.

Mr Stevens said this process could lead to hundreds of thousands fewer patients being referred to hospital.

But Age UK's Caroline Abrahams criticised the move, saying it would lead to "misery and pain" for older people and make it harder for them to maintain their independence.

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Curbing drug spending

The NHS spends about £16bn a year on drugs and medicines. But the bill has been rising quickly - up 7% in the past year.

This is the largest area of spending after staffing.

Firstly, a cap has been set on the bill for new drugs. The rollout of any new treatments that are going to cost the NHS more than £20m a year will now be delayed to give health bosses time to open talks with the industry on price.

Secondly, NHS England has said it will review "low value" medicines, such as suncream, gluten-free foods and some painkillers, which could save £400m a year.

Both of these steps had already been announced prior to this report.

- **NHS to introduce £20m cap on new drugs**
- **NHS targets suncream prescriptions for cuts**

A&E waits to get shorter

The four-hour A&E target is to stay. Hospitals have been asked to start hitting the 95% threshold again by March 2018. Current performance stands at just over 85%.

To help, each hospital is being asked to introduce GP triaging, where doctors on the front door advise patients with minor illnesses and injuries of other places they can get help.

NHS England has promised that half the population will have access to evening and weekend GP opening by March 2018, with the rest of the country following a year later.

Rapid cancer diagnosis

Another area that will be prioritised will be cancer care. A strategy was launched in 2015 setting out a vision for "world-class" services by 2020.

This latest report highlights an upgrade of radiotherapy equipment and the introduction of 10 new rapid diagnostic centres by next March.

The latter will house a range of specialists under one roof, meaning patients will no longer have to be referred back and forth between GP and specialist.

These steps, NHS England said, will help achieve the ambition of ensuring cancer diagnoses are made within four weeks by 2020, and lead to the 62-day target for cancer treatment to once again be hit - it has been missed for much of the past 18 months.

But Mr Stevens admitted the NHS needed more staff in this area.

But what about the money?

One area Mr Stevens refused to be drawn on was money. When he launched his five-year strategy, he explicitly asked for £8bn of extra funding for the NHS.

Ministers gave the front line the extra money this Parliament, but in doing so cut other areas of the wider health budget, including training programmes for staff and funding for healthy lifestyle schemes, such as stop-smoking services.

Mr Stevens said this report was about what the NHS could "deliver" within the current level of funding, not about whether the budget was enough.

However, when asked, he refused to say he was happy with the amount of money the NHS was getting.

But others have not been so reticent. Dr Mark Porter, of the British Medical Association, said: "Achieving one delivery promise only by missing another is a textbook example of rationing access to care. It should not be happening in today's NHS."

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Life on an NHS waiting list: Peter's story

One in 14 people in England is now on an NHS waiting list.

Peter was one of them.

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