

The review of Health and social care leadership.

I am publishing tomorrow's blog now, as the Health Secretary has just spoken to Conference and this provides some of the relevant detailed background for those writing about it.

In response to those of us who have asked how the new Secretary of State will ensure the extra money directed to the NHS will be used to raise the quality of care, improve access and get the waiting lists down, Mr Javid has announced a review of NHS and Care leadership.

He has appointed General Sir Gordon Messenger and Dame Linda Pollard to conduct a review into how efficiency and innovation can be improved in the NHS and how regional inequalities can be reduced. As Health now has a massive £230 bn budget, absorbing all of our Income tax, CGT, Inheritance tax and Stamp Duty it is indeed time to review how it can be better spent and to ask what another £12 bn can bring that £230 bn cannot achieve. I wish to explore this in a few pieces and pass on my thoughts to the Secretary of State. I would have preferred the terms of the review to have been more narrowly focussed on quality and cost of care.

Let us begin by asking what can we expect of the two lead characters appointed? I wish them both well and acknowledge they have had successful careers in public service. May they be wise and insightful in this task, stepping outside the frequent public sector wish to claim all is well and turn most arguments into one about how much extra money is required. Often the need is to remedy defects in the way the base budgets are spent.

General Sir Gordon can draw on the talents, bravery and discipline our soldiers show, and their ability to improvise and respond quickly when on active service. He was decorated for his personal bravery in leading troops in action. I hope he has also learned from some of the failings of MOD and senior army management. There is a long history of big budget overruns and delays when buying equipment. The use of the rank of Lieutenant Colonel paying around £80,000 a year for 1510 senior officers in a service of 82,000 armed personnel does not look like slim management. There are 590 more officers of ranks above Lieutenant Colonel to fill the main national management roles.

Dame Linda Pollard can draw on the example of the bravery, hard work and versatility shown by the front line NHS workers handling serious covid cases over the last year and a half. The Leeds Teaching Hospital she chairs was last rated as Good by the Care Quality Commission. It did, however, receive criticism for safety which needed improvement. It failed to meet performance standards for referrals to treatment – i.e. too many people waited too long. Its emergency readmission rates were above the national average meaning more remedial treatments were needed. Its staff cost per unit of work were lower than average but its non staff costs higher. I would be more reassured about

her advice were Leeds to have an outstanding rating for safety and quality of care, and were it not to have issues in getting waiting lists down.

The media did not seem to report any of this, saying the review was an attack on waste and wokery. It is not quite what the announcement says. I do think the Secretary of State needs to sit down urgently with the leading CEOs running the NHS in England to get them to identify what they need to do to get waiting lists down, the prime current objective. Of course this also entails performance criteria for quality of treatment and cost. His own performance monitoring system which is very detailed by CQC should help him decide which of the senior CEOs are good, which need to be mentored to improve and which if any need to be removed for continuing poor results.