



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Maria Caulfield MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Primary Care and Patient Safety*

*39 Victoria Street
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Selaine Saxby MP

By email to: selaine.saxby.mp@parliament.uk

30 December 2021

Dear Selaine,

Thank you for your correspondence of 18 September on behalf of a number of your constituents, about health services in Braunton. Please accept my apologies for the delay in replying.

I hope you will appreciate that the role of the Department of Health and Social Care is to put in place a strategic framework for the NHS to work within and provide overall health service funding. Decisions about NHS services are essentially a matter for the NHS locally.

General practice teams have done a huge amount to support their patients and communities throughout the pandemic, including playing a vital leading role in our COVID-19 vaccination programme. We are extremely grateful for their continued efforts.

In October, the Government and NHSE&I published a new package of measures, all of which aim to help GPs with the challenges they are currently facing. The plan is backed by a new £250 million Winter Access Fund of non-recurring revenue funding, which is being ring-fenced to protect and expand capacity in general practice, until March 2022. The investment will fund locums and support from other health professionals, including physiotherapists and podiatrists, with a focus on increasing capacity to boost urgent same-day care.

This package will also expand the NHSE&I-led access improvement programme, which also supports practices to provide good access to GP services. The scheme is already working with over 900 practices experiencing the greatest access challenges to reduce waiting times, improve patient experience, and ultimately improve the working lives of general practice teams. The programme will be expanded to accommodate 200 more practices, helping them to reduce waiting times and increase the number of available appointments through interventions that have already shown the most impact.

We are committed to supporting general practice to deliver an extra 50 million appointments a year by March 2024 and to expand its workforce so that practices have more capacity to deliver better care. Part of this expansion is enabled by the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme, which is open to all primary care networks to reimburse 100 per cent of the employment costs of a wide range of primary care professionals, such as pharmacists and physiotherapists.

We are also training more GPs than ever before. In 2020, the highest ever number of doctors accepted a place on the GP Training Programme in England – a total of 3,793

against a target of 3,500 – and we have committed to increasing the number of GP training places to 4,000 from 2021.

Regarding pharmacies, I agree that more can be done to better utilise the skills of community pharmacy teams.

The NHS Long Term Plan and the consultation *Advancing our Health: Prevention in the 2020s* set out the Government's ambition in this regard. This was further elaborated in the *Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework for 2019/20 to 2023/24*, which was announced in July 2019 following successful negotiations with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC). Together, the PSNC, the department, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) set out a five-year programme of work to deliver an expanded role for community pharmacy, to help more people stay well in their community. These arrangements took effect in October 2019.

The deal committed almost £13 billion to community pharmacy (£2.592 billion per year) to support the introduction of new services to develop and expand the role of community pharmacy. The deal contains commitments to work with the sector to introduce automation and improve skill-mix in order to free up pharmacists' time to deliver the new services.

In addition to working with community pharmacies to develop the services they offer, NHSE&I has increased the number of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians working within general practice, urgent care and care homes. This will help to embed pharmacy skills across the system and promote more collaborative and joined-up working in primary care.

With regard to dentists, the Government recognises there is more we can do to improve dental services and ensure that patients are able to access the care they need. The Chief Dental Officer and NHS England are also looking closely at how NHS activity can support our wider work to tackle health inequalities by focusing activity on those in greatest need of treatment.

We are taking steps to improve the recruitment and retention of dentists by:

- improving career pathways through Health Education England's (HEE's) *Advancing Dental Care* programme;
- reforming the current dental contract to make the NHS more attractive for the dental profession; and
- using NHS England's flexible commissioning framework, which is allowing for a greater use of the skill mix of all disciplines within the dental team, with the aim of creating a capable and motivated multidisciplinary workforce.

We will continue to work with HEE to ensure we have the data to support future workforce planning and address shortages of dental professionals in some areas and clinical specialties, through local sustainability transformation partnerships and integrated care systems.

Turning more closely to the provision of services in South West England, I would like to assure your constituents that dental reform is a regional priority for the NHS, which is

supporting dental practices to resume services following the pandemic response and building on this so that services are better than before. The South West Dental Reform Programme was set up in 2020 to bring together NHS England's Dental Commissioning Team with key stakeholders with responsibility for oral health in the region. The purpose of the programme is to inform the strategy for the future of NHS dental services that will contribute to the overall improvement of oral health for people living in South West England.

If your constituents continue to experience difficulties in accessing dental services, I suggest that they contact NHS England for help. Its contact details are:

NHS England
PO Box 16738
Redditch B97 9PT

Tel: 0300 311 22 33
Email: england.contactus@nhs.net

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Maria'.

MARIA CAULFIELD