



LETTERS

REDUCING WASTEFUL DRUG PRESCRIPTIONS

It's time to fund health and social care properly

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Majeed correctly points out that restrictions on prescribing and reduced availability of drug treatments on the NHS, as well as stopping prescription of gluten free food products for patients with celiac disease, might have unforeseen negative consequences, particularly in vulnerable groups such as children.^{1 2} These might increase healthcare costs in the longer term.

Although Clinical Commissioning Groups cannot enforce prescribing restrictions on general practitioners, this is likely to change as national guidance is rolled out. Majeed says that the financial savings required from the NHS mean that publicly funded healthcare must be cut or patients must pay more for their own treatment. This is not a dichotomy as one will inevitably follow the other, creating inequity related to the ability to pay—a fundamental undermining of the basic principles of the NHS.

A recent report from a group in Oxford has indicated that as many as 30 000 excess deaths might be related to dismantling of health and social care by this government.³ The unprecedented slowing down of increasing life expectancy has led Michael

Marmot to say, “We need to recognise that you can’t keep cutting and cutting and cutting and expect nothing to happen . . . even length of life could get worse if you keep cutting things that improve people’s lives.”⁴

Surely it is time to end austerity, fund health and social care properly, and get rid of the market in healthcare, freeing up billions of pounds for treating patients? Is this not what politicians and the public really need to understand?

Competing interests: None declared.

- 1 Majeed A. NHS England's plan to reduce wasteful and ineffective drug prescriptions. *BMJ* 2017;358:j3679. doi:10.1136/bmj.j3679 pmid:28765109.
- 2 Puntis JWL, Tighe MP. Should patients with coeliac disease pay for their treatment? *Arch Dis Child* 2017;358:691-2. doi:10.1136/archdischild-2017-313369 pmid:28611066.
- 3 Hiam L, Dorling D, Harrison D, McKee M. What caused the spike in mortality in England and Wales in January 2015? *J R Soc Med* 2017;358:131-7. doi:10.1177/0141076817693600 pmid:28208024.
- 4 Marmot M. What's going on with life expectancy? Podcast. http://bmj.co/life_expectancy_2017

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