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BMA ANNUAL REPRESENTATIVE MEETING

Covid-19: Bureaucracy and targets are distracting from patient care and should be suspended, say doctors

Elisabeth Mahase

Unnecessary bureaucracy and targets are distracting from patient care and should be suspended until the pandemic recovery is completed, doctors have said.

At the BMA's annual representative meeting, doctors voted in favour of a motion which called for honesty with the public over what pandemic recovery will look like. They also backed substantial additional financial investment in the NHS to increase and support the necessary workforce, equipment, facilities, and support services required for the health system and its staff to recover.

Supporting the motion, John Ip, medical director of Glasgow local medical committee, said, "I believe that we will weather the current storms, but we need to do it our way and not be directed by some faceless bureaucrat. Give us what we need and we'll make it work. We need real financial investment into services, the additional workforce that has been promised, and the removal of red tape and regulation on GP practices. And finally, we need the lies about general practice to stop."

The motion had also suggested that the private sector should be part of recovery plans for elective care, however this was rejected by members.

Speaking against this part of the motion, BMA Welsh council and consultants committee member Manish Adke said, "If we try to involve the private sector in the recovery plan, we'll fail. We've seen these companies come in to take over NHS care and fail. If we give a blank cheque to the private sector to come and play in the recovery plan, we'll suffer financially and there'll be no way back for the NHS to build up services in the future."

This motion comes after the UK government announced that the NHS in England will get an extra £5.4bn (€6.3bn; \$7.5bn) in funding over the next six months to help tackle lengthening waiting lists and manage the immediate pressures of the pandemic. While many health leaders welcomed the money, they said it must be the start of many more investments and highlighted that sustained funding in the long term will be vital.¹

The Health Foundation has estimated it will cost up to £16.8bn between 2021 and 2024-25 just to enable the NHS to clear the backlog of people waiting for routine elective care, return to the 18 week waiting time target, and treat millions of patients who were expected to receive care during the pandemic but did not.

The conference also passed a motion calling for a campaign on the introduction of safe staffing legislation across the UK and the development of a plan to support doctors who are dealing with performance problems as a result of system pressures.

¹ Mahase E. NHS funding: £5.4bn boost must be first of many, say health leaders. *BMJ* 2021;374:n2204. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n2204. <https://www.bmj.com/content/374/bmj.n2204>. pmid: 34493530

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