I owe a lot to the NHS. I don’t just mean my job, my career, or the opportunities it’s given me for wider roles beyond clinical work—I mean on a personal front.

I was born nearly 50 years ago in Wordsley Hospital, a small NHS institution based in Dudley, my parents’ home for a few years before we all returned to India. Fast forward a few more years and I moved back to the UK, where my relationship with the NHS resumed. Always there, like a comfort blanket ready to be wrapped around me when I needed care.

Over its 75 years the NHS has been constantly buffeted by politicians and their ideologies. It’s faced discussions about its survival, its funding model, and—and beyond election soundbites—how much politicians believe in its continued existence. It’s treated a growing population with comorbidities and dealt with rising costs of medicines and technology. It’s been led with varying success over the years, and now it’s in trouble. The service’s outcome measures, in terms of international comparisons, aren’t something to be proud of. Access to good care is subject to much variation, with differential outcomes based on the ethnicity of patients.

On the 75th birthday of the NHS we’re full of doubt, worry, and despair about whether it will see its 100th year. Yet the NHS also evokes unparalleled passion in society. It fills us with pride, showcasing something good in a country desperate to hold on to anything it can be proud of. We’ve arrived at a point where the NHS spends more time telling people not to go to hospitals, clinics, or GP surgeries, yet without necessarily any support to tackle issues such as deprivation, which affects people’s ability to self-manage their lives. The continuing narrative of the responsibility ultimately being with the individual—“eat less, move more, drink less, behave better”—is constant, despite little evidence to show that it works.

Changes at the societal level will come only from tackling deprivation at scale, through incremental changes that filter into the health system over decades, not months. We hear the cry for investment in X and Y, aiming to save money in the long term. But there’s no money to invest in the now, without stopping something else. That’s how tight budgets have become.