Health and Social Care

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health Committee

Today's debate on the supplementary estimates and the financial position of health and social care matters, first and foremost, because of the impact of that financial position on patient care. I start by paying tribute to our health and care staff across the country and, at this particular time, by noting and thanking those who have come from across the European Union to work in this country.

The current financial position is of great concern. As a result of the wider economic downturn, we are now in the seventh year of the longest financial squeeze in the history of the NHS. Although the Department of Health's budget has been protected in relation to many others, we cannot escape the fact that over the previous Parliament the average annual increase in its budget was 1.1%, which is far lower than the increase in demand and, of course, far lower than the historical increase of 3.8% since the late 1970s. All that is in the context of an extremely challenging position for social care. Between 2009-10 and 2014-15, there was a 10% real-terms reduction in social care spending by local authorities.

All that has taken place in the face of an extraordinary increase in demand, because of not only a rising population but our changing demographics. To put that into context, over the decade to 2015 there was a 31% increase in the number of people living to 85 and beyond, and we estimate that over the next 20 years we will see a 60% increase in the number of individuals who rely on social care. Over the years there has been an abject failure of Governments to plan for that, although it was entirely predictable. We absolutely cannot just keep ducking the question. We need not only to address the immediate financial problems that face health and social care, but to come together as a House to address the problems for the future.

Bill Wiggin Chair, Committee of Selection

It occurs to me that this is not a uniquely British problem; it is in fact a global one. I have been trying to find out where in the world social care is best delivered and whether we can learn anything from those countries.

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health Committee

My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are all looking forward to the publication of the House of Lords report on future sustainability, because of course we have much to learn from other systems. I pay tribute to the Public Accounts Committee, which today published its report on the financial sustainability of the NHS. We have also seen the final position of trusts at the end of the previous quarter, so we now know that 135 providers ended that quarter in deficit. We are on course for a financial deficit across trusts of between Â£750 million and Â£850 million at the end of the financial year.

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