

Rt Hon Theresa May MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 0AA

17 January 2017

Dear Prime Minister,

I have been horrified to see the position which you have taken in responding to the current crisis in the NHS in England. In playing down what is happening in hospitals up and down the country – with beds at full capacity, daily breaches in A&E, and critical operations being cancelled – and in then seeking to lay the blame on general practice, your government appears to be seeking deliberately to distract from what is really happening in the NHS.

The government's attempt to scapegoat GPs for a system wide crisis resulting from years of underfunding must be addressed. The current crisis in the health service extends well beyond A&Es, with all parts of the NHS, including GP surgeries, working as hard as possible to keep up with demand. As the chair of the BMA general practice committee has made clear, GPs are seeing more patients than ever before, this is despite a severe workforce shortage of one in three practices with unfilled GP vacancies, and a recent BMA survey of more than 5,000 GPs finding that 84 per cent said their workload is unmanageable and having a direct impact on the quality and safety of patient care. The issues which we are seeing: hospitals declaring alerts indicating their organisations are unable to deliver comprehensive care; trollies with seriously ill patients backed up in corridors; patients being sent home because there are no beds available for them or waiting hours on end in ambulances before being admitted, are not due to a difficulty in accessing a GP and certainly will not be solved by penalising and scapegoating an already critically under-resourced and understaffed general practice.

The BMA has repeatedly raised with the government that the current NHS funding settlement is inadequate to deliver the standard of care which patients deserve and that doctors and our colleagues in health and social care want to be able to provide. The government position that it has "fully funded" the NHS' own plan for modernising services is now widely discredited – not least by the chief executive of NHS England - and the facts simply speak for themselves. Services are failing patients and their families, tying the hands of those who care for them, in the face of titanic pressures across the system.

I have heard your refusal to acknowledge that the increases in funding called for by every corner of the health sector and experienced commentators are necessary to address both the current crisis and safeguard the future of the NHS. You say that funding needs to go hand in hand with reform and the BMA, with many others, would accept that changes are necessary to respond to our population's needs. But the continual salami slicing, the presentation of cuts as improvements in the face of palpably



deteriorating services and the scapegoating of those who work in the service have led to this situation, one in which patients' lives and well-being are at risk. This should not be acceptable for any government.

So, I write to request an urgent meeting so that you can meet and talk to working doctors to hear the reality of delivering care in this country in 2017. We want to be part of the solution to the challenges which the NHS faces and hope you will take up what is a genuine offer to meet and to work with you to try to find and agree a solution to the pressures currently facing the NHS.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Porter." The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Dr Mark Porter
BMA council chair