

British Geriatrics Society
Improving healthcare for older people

BCGS

Our manifesto for the 2019 General Election



About the BGS

The British Geriatrics Society (BGS) is the membership association for professionals specialising in the healthcare of older people across the UK. Founded in 1947, we now have over 4,000 members, and we are the only society in the UK offering specialist expertise in the wide range of healthcare needs of older people.

Older people are the main users of health and social care services and their high morbidity rates, different patterns of disease presentation, slower response to treatment and requirements for social support call for specialist medical skills. Geriatricians, nurses, GPs, old age psychiatrists, allied healthcare professionals and researchers provide high quality care for older people as part of a multidisciplinary team during acute illness, chronic illness, rehabilitation and at the end of life, both in hospital and community settings.

The BGS works across the four nations of the UK. However, as health and social care is a devolved matter, this publication focuses on England, although the themes remain relevant across the UK.

Context

We are at a crucial point in time regarding the care of older people. People are living longer and in better health than ever before, but the UK's population is rapidly ageing – it is projected that in 50 years, there will be an additional 8.6 million people aged 65 and over. Many older people have made and continue to make a significant contribution to society through raising families and paying taxes throughout their working lives and through volunteering and caring for others in their retirement. Our ageing population is therefore something to be celebrated and cherished. However, an ageing population also brings its challenges which include more people than ever before living with complex needs.

The *NHS Long Term Plan* sets out proposals that could have a real impact on older people and those who care for them, if properly implemented and funded. An opportunity exists now for the incoming Government to take decisive action and make the UK the best place in the world in which to grow old.

In order to do this, they must prioritise the following areas:

1

Provide a lasting solution to the social care crisis

Properly funded and co-ordinated social care is essential if we are to enable older people to lead healthy, independent lives for longer. 1.4 million people aged over 65 are currently living with unmet social care needs, meaning that they are struggling to cope with everyday living.² Too many older people are stranded in hospital – with the deconditioning that ensues – for want of appropriate social care on discharge.

While the *NHS Long Term Plan* has been written on the basis that funding for adult social care is sufficient to ensure that it does not impose any additional pressures on the NHS,³ it cannot be denied that health and social care are intrinsically linked and cannot be viewed in isolation. Older people who have the support they need from social care services are more likely to remain independent for longer and less likely to be admitted to hospital. If they are admitted to hospital, their stay will be shorter if they have appropriate social care services available to them.

Successive governments have promised and failed to deliver a sustainable solution to adult social care, letting down thousands of older people with frailty, dementia and other long-term conditions. We call on the incoming Government to prioritise investment in adult social care to allow more older people to live independently for longer.

2

Integrate services between health and social care, and between primary and acute care

Older people are more likely than other population groups to encounter health and care services in a range of settings including GP practices, hospitals, care homes and in the community. The *NHS Long Term Plan* includes important initiatives to help ensure services for older people are joined up – between health and social care, and primary and acute NHS care, and with partners from community and voluntary sectors.

The new Government must ensure that this integration is continued and the momentum created by the *Long Term Plan* is continued. This will enable older people to access the services that they need when they need them, thus helping them to live independently for longer.

3

Enable access to high-quality care and support that is appropriate to older people's needs including a comprehensive geriatric assessment and personalised care and support plan

The *NHS Long Term Plan* includes a welcome commitment to ensuring that older people living with frailty, dementia and other long-term and complex conditions will be offered targeted support for their physical and mental health.

The BGS believes that this promise should be delivered in the form of comprehensive geriatric assessment and personalised care and support plans for all older people who need them. It is essential that these plans result in the implementation of personalised, high-quality care and support for every older person in every setting. Older people who are nearing the end of their lives must also be supported to plan for this with their families and healthcare professionals. This should help them to achieve a good death in the place of their choice, during which they are treated with dignity and compassion.



4

Ensure that the health and social care workforce is fully and sustainably resourced

Most health and social care professionals will work with older people more than any other population group. Care for older people is an area where true multi-professional working is essential. There is clear evidence showing better outcomes where geriatricians, nurses, GPs, therapists, pharmacists, social workers and other health and care professionals work together, and with older people and their families. It is therefore essential that we have more specialists in the care of older people and that generalists have training to enable them to deliver the right care for our ageing population.

The NHS and social care workforce is dangerously under-funded and under-resourced. Latest statistics show that the NHS has a vacancy rate of 8.1% which is the equivalent of 100,500 posts.⁴ It is estimated that there is currently a 7.8% vacancy rate (equating to 122,000 vacancies) within adult social care.⁵ The *Interim NHS People Plan* showed a great deal of ambition for the workforce but did not include much detail about how this ambition would be realised or funded. We call on the incoming Government to act promptly on recruitment and retention, training and professional development and to ensure that these areas are adequately funded.

5

Prioritise prevention of ill health to help older people stay healthier for longer

Prevention is and should be the cornerstone of care for older people. So much of what geriatricians, nurses, GPs and allied health professionals working with older people do is aimed at achieving better health outcomes for their patients, allowing them to stay well, remain independent, stay at home or closer to home, and return home as quickly as possible when they are ready to be discharged from hospital care. Prevention has been a priority for Government in recent years with the publication of the *Prevention Green Paper* in July 2019.

We call on the incoming Government to continue to prioritise prevention of ill health and to ensure that this focus includes later life and older people. Prevention is relevant at all ages and must have a wider focus than standard messages of lifestyle change and ensuring that people are able to continue to contribute financially to society. When considering the prevention of ill health, the Government must also consider how older people – including those who may already have long term health problems – can be supported to live as well as possible and to stay healthier for longer.

References

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4. Office for National Statistics (2019). What are the vacancy trends in the public sector?, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/economy/government-publicsectorandtaxes/publicspending/articles/whatarethevacancytrendsinthepublicsector/2019-08-06#nhs-staff-numbers-have-been-increasing-while-the-vacancy-rate-has-decreased-slightly-but-remains-high (accessed 30 October 2019)
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