

British Geriatrics Society
Improving healthcare for older people

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The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
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30 June 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

The British Geriatrics Society congratulates you on your appointment as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and sends you best wishes as you take on this crucial and challenging portfolio.

We are the membership organisation for all healthcare professionals engaged in the treatment and care of older people across the UK. Since 1947 our members have been at the forefront of transforming the quality of care available to older people. Our vision is for a society where all older people receive high-quality patient-centred care when and where they need it.

Understandably, your priority as you take on your new role will be to plan the nation's recovery from the pandemic. Older people have borne the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic with 90% of deaths from COVID occurring in people aged 65 or older. As we hopefully move out of the pandemic, it is essential that older people are supported to be part of the nation's recovery and rebuilding of health and social care services. More widely, you will know that generally across the UK, people are living for longer, many enjoying a healthy and active older age. But for many older people, later life brings frailty and multiple health problems, creating a rising need for healthcare. As you plan for the recovery from the pandemic, we urge you to think about the UK's older people and about sustainable, high-quality care for the long term. We have identified five key areas which we believe should be key to your plans over the coming months.

1. **Plan for the increased needs of older people.** Some older people will have had COVID and be experiencing long-term after effects of the virus which require ongoing treatment. Others will have avoided COVID but will have been less active during the lockdown and have

deconditioned over the past year. It is important that these new needs are recognised and provided for – it is not sufficient to return to ‘normal’; we must build back better for older people.

2. **A sustainable solution to the crisis in social care.** The pandemic has exposed the long-brewing crisis in social care. This Government was aware of this crisis well before the beginning of the pandemic and the Prime Minister has promised several times to implement a fair and sustainable social care system. We urge you, as Secretary of State for both Health and Social Care, to prioritise this as you take office.
3. **Addressing pent-up demand for health services among older people.** You will be aware that during the pandemic, waiting lists have grown significantly. As work begins to catch up on treatment that has been postponed over the last 18 months, we urge you not to concentrate only on people with single conditions. Older people often have complex needs and it may take longer to catch up on their care and rehabilitation. Older people were neglected in the first stages of the pandemic; please do not neglect them in the recovery.
4. **Acknowledge the mental health impact of lockdown.** Many older people will have spent lockdown lonely and isolated. This may be even worse for people with cognitive impairments such as dementia, even if they live in care homes with other people, as they may have been prevented from seeing their families and not been able to understand why. The impact of the pandemic on older people’s mental health has been significant and we urge you to prioritise older people’s mental health services over the coming months.
5. **Prioritise the health and social care workforce.** During the pandemic, we conducted two surveys of our members and both found high levels of burnout, stress and anxiety among healthcare professionals caring for older people. Worrying numbers of people are considering making a change to their working life, including taking early retirement, moving to less than full time working or moving to non-clinical roles. The health and social care workforce is already under-resourced and can ill afford a mass exodus of trained and qualified professionals. It will be important over the coming months and years to support healthcare professionals to come to terms with their experiences over the last year so that they are refreshed and ready to care for our ageing population. It will also be essential to recruit and train more specialists in older people’s care and ensure that all healthcare professionals have a basic understanding in caring for their biggest patient group.

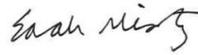
We acknowledge that these are challenging areas and prioritising them will not be easy. Our members are experts in older people’s healthcare. They work in multidisciplinary teams in different care settings

across the country. We stand ready to contribute in any way we can to ensure that older people are supported to age healthily and to live independently for as long as possible. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how we can work together to ensure that the legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic is a better society for older people. If you would like to arrange a meeting, please contact our Policy Manager Sally Greenbook at s.greenbrook@bgs.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Jennifer Burns
President



Sarah Mistry
Chief Executive