Old Grey Matter article for last Saturday’s EADT (November 2018)

 Social Care matters
An itAn item from the November issue of National Pensioners Convention (NPC) Campaign em from the November issue of National Pensioners Convention (NPC) Campaign Bulletin is worthy of interest to elderly people.Titled ‘Budget falls £2bn short of filling care gap’, it states that health professionals, charities and campaigners have all described the Chancellor’s Budget announcement of extra funding for Social Care as totally inadequate.

Whilst Philip Hammond pledged an extra £650m for local councils to fund social services for the coming year, in the small print of the budget documents, it showed that £240m of that money has actually been put aside for the NHS. This means that only £410m has been earmarked for social care - well short of the £2.35bn funding gap highlighted by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services.

Jan Shortt, NPC General Secretary said: “Every day, well over a million older people are going without the care and support they need because the service has collapsed. The green paper on social care still looks a long way off and in the meantime, our most vulnerable and needy older people are left to struggle on. Talk of economic growth and the end of austerity are pretty meaningless if you’re relying on the care system, and there’s little in the budget to give you any hope”.

The integration of social care with the NHS also deserved a mention in the budget. But no, there was little mention of the problems its absence is causing in the discharge of patients from acute hospital beds, and little extra resources to deal with the problem of returning elderly patients into a safe home environment with an adequate care package.

Home NHS care is something being tried out in the Lowestoft area through efficiency savings and the disposal of old hospital sites but is this really sustainable? The sheer numbers involved in last winter’s spike on bed occupancy shows that an intermediate plan is needed to discharge patients safely into convalescent type beds formerly provided routinely in the smaller town and village hospitals.

These have now mainly closed in North East Suffolk except for Beccles and the former NHS Lowestoft Hospital site has been auctioned off to a private developer for £475,000. Care homes are usually full and what now for an NHS Clinic for the population of North Lowestoft promised in the original consultation, with both the CCG and the James Paget hospital in debt?

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