

OLD GREY MATTER ARTICLE

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Looking after the Ordinary Person

A letter of greetings and statement from Norman Lamb MP was well-received for discussion at the Annual Regional Conference of the Anglia Region Pensioners Association NPC last week. The MP's position on the state of the NHS and Social care measures up to the evidence compiled by the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) as NPC's Hon Secretary Dot Gibson reiterated at the Attleborough venue.

The NPC states in its October Campaign Bulletin that influential health think tanks, the King's Fund and The Nuffield Foundation are the latest to produce a report into the dire state of the social care sector. Whilst it is useful to shine a spotlight into the problems older people and their carers face, much of it is already known. In fact, we don't really need another report to tell us about the 'perfect storm' facing our social care system, that includes: * Severe cuts to funding of over £5bn in the last six years * Growing demand, accompanied by a tighter rationing of services and a reduction in the number of people receiving support * The continued unfairness of self-funders paying more for their care and effectively subsidising local authorities * The decline of support and preventative services in the community, putting greater strain on the NHS * A funding model of many private care providers that is unsustainable * The accumulation of continued failure by successive governments to adequately address these problems. What we need are not more reports but bold action by government to fully address these systemic inadequacies through the tax system.

Norman Lamb's comment is quoted as follows: "The sad reality is that the NHS and the care system is on its knees, with the severe funding shortage having dreadful consequences for people across the country. CCGs are drawing up plans to ration treatment. Cancelled operations are causing enormous strain. Record numbers of people are stuck in hospital when they are ready to go home because of a lack of care in the community. I believe that the first task of a civilised society should be to protect the vulnerable, but more and more elderly people are being left to fend for themselves because of cuts to government-funded care.

The current situation is intolerable, but is only going to get worse under the Government's current spending plans. To tackle this existential crisis, I have set out my proposal for a dedicated NHS and Care Tax, shown on your *[a working person's]* pay packet, with all the money raised being used to support our health and care services. We have to be honest about the scale of this crisis, and politicians have to be prepared to make difficult decisions. This is not a conclusion I have reached lightly. But the evidence is overwhelming that this is the only way to sustain a compassionate NHS that can meet the needs of an ageing population, and social care services that support our most vulnerable people, irrespective of ability to pay."

In a few years a quarter of the whole population of our country will be aged 65+ and many would agree with Norman Lamb and the NPC that a decent NHS and Social Care Service worthy of its name to cater for all health and care needs of the vulnerable would be worth the extra income tax levied for that purpose. Despite not mentioning pensioners once in her keynote Conservative Party speech, surely she and her Government must recognise the urgency of the situation if it wants to cater for the 'ordinary person' as she herself so passionately announced and renounce the current increasingly outrageous rationing regime of austerity. As the saying goes: people may doubt what you say, but they will believe what you do!

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