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20 April 2020

The Rt. Hon, Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health & Social Care
Department of Health & Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Dear Matt Hancock,

The National Pensioners Convention is the largest campaigning organisation in the UK standing up for rights and dignity in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

We have in the past requested meetings with you or someone in your department to talk about the ongoing crisis in social care and to share some solutions with you. Unfortunately, it has always been a busy time for you and we have not had the opportunity to sit down with you and have a reasoned discussion about the future of care.

This letter is by way of an open conversation from the NPC side that we hope you find interesting enough to share. We make no apology for some of the factual content in this conversation as it has a direct bearing on how the fragmentation of NHS and care services has underpinned the way in which both have been woefully unprepared to deal with the COVID-19 crisis.

A decade of chronic underfunding of the NHS, Local Government and Care providers is the responsibility of the current government and the decisions taken during that time have, as we now see, come home to roost. The benefit of hindsight is a wonderful thing, and we believe with that the government may have made different decisions. In particular, the behaviour by your party in the House of Commons on denying a pay rise to NHS staff – the same staff you now call heroes – giving their lives on the front line.

We enclose with this conversation, information in regard to the outsourcing of contracts to non-NHS providers. Tax payer's money no longer circulating in the economy, profit being made from vulnerable people with a variety of complex health and care needs. These are irrefutable facts from your own department's accounts, but we do know that there is an abundance of undisclosed contracts where the paper trail is fudged and difficult to follow. Public money must be accounted for and we expect that the government will be open, transparent and honest about how it is spent in the future.

In January 2019, you stood in front of the Health Select Committee as Secretary of State and pledged 'no privatisation on my watch.' Sadly, the figures that are available to date reveal that to be a false pledge. A conversation needs to take place on how we can help you fulfil that pledge in future years.

The response to the COVID-19 crisis leaves a lot to be desired. Despite your promises of millions of units of protective equipment being delivered, there are still those working on the front line without the proper protective equipment to enable them to be safe whilst working night and day to save lives. The ability to test even front line staff let alone anyone else is inadequate to say the least. The spread of the virus will continue unless and until the government gets a grip on making tests widely available so decisions can be made about the extent of lockdown.

The strategy to deal with COVID-19 started off with advice to the over 70's and anyone with underlying health conditions to self-isolate. The majority have done so, but the strategy lacked the resources to make it work in care homes and those receiving care in their own homes. Not to publish deaths from the virus at these locations is remiss and as Age UK have said: 'older people have been airbrushed out of the virus figures.' It appears that the care and concern for the elderly and vulnerable has somewhat shifted. Under-reporting of deaths will not give confidence to the public and certainly will not gain the government any kudos. Sadly, we have seen too many younger victims of the virus which demonstrates that we have very little knowledge and understanding of how it operates.

We are sure you agree that there are lessons to be learned from this extraordinary chapter in our history. It is abundantly clear that public services of any kind are crucial in times like these with the economy on the downward trend, workers at home, job losses and a myriad of other issues that are an impact on each and every one. There will, no doubt be a reflection by the government on the damage inflicted on those public services by the year on year funding cuts with the same, if not more, expectations on service delivery.

So, to the future. The health of a nation dictates how well the nation's economy acts. A progressive thinking government would understand that it needs to make sure that health and care services are a priority if we are to become a productive nation again. There are many who have said that '*a nation is judged on how it treats its weakest citizens.*' We suggest this is a starting point.

Our conversation with you would urge the government to become proactive rather than reactive. To accept parity of illnesses and treat them equally; to accept parity between the NHS and care as holistic services giving support to communities across the country. It is every citizen's right to expect the same level of care and access to health services.

To do this, the government must invest in the future by:

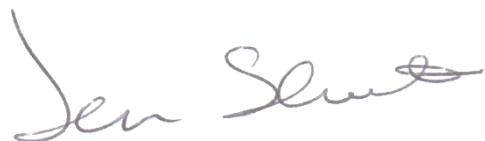
- Fully funding the NHS
- Fully funding Local Government
- Funding Charities with public service track records in health and care
- Fully funding a National Care Service free at the point of need, through general taxation.
- Creating an income for 'informal carers' – those who save the government billions of pounds each year for the pittance of carer's allowance or in lots of cases, nothing at all.

We understand the enormous impact on the economy of this tragic situation and older people already contributing directly or indirectly to the treasury around £160billion a year will continue to do their bit. However, there is a section of society that appears to be able to grow their wealth with impunity. We believe there are opportunities to be taken now to ensure that the huge inequality that exists in this country – not just in access to health and care services – is redressed.

As a survivor of COVID-19 yourself, we believe you know the right thing to do now. Respecting each individual for their talents and contributions to the country should be an everyday part of government policy, behaving as adults should to set an example on the road to recovery.

We know difficult decisions will have to be made as the economy suffers world-wide. Being a forward-thinking government prepared to take ground-breaking actions will boost the economy in so many ways. This is definitely a conversation we would like to continue and look forward to meeting you soon.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'Jan Shortt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jan Shortt
General Secretary

Enc. NHS Commissioning contracts
Copy letter to Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP

