Dear Chancellor,

In advance of the Budget, and further to the British Medical Association’s submission to the Treasury consultation, I am writing once more to highlight the dire need for an increased financial settlement for the NHS. It is now common knowledge, and there is widespread authoritative agreement, that the NHS is simply not coping with unprecedented patient demand against a backdrop of crippling financial restraint.

This is seriously impacting on patient care and services. Patients are waiting longer for ambulances; to be seen in accident and emergency departments; for critical operations; for their diagnostics; and, to see their family doctor. The situation I describe is borne out in the NHS’ own stark statistics. In 2017, the NHS in England has failed to meet almost all of its key targets, this includes A&E, cancer services and planned operation targets. The message from hospitals around the country could not be clearer.

In primary care, the proportion of patients waiting two or more weeks for a GP appointment has risen by over seven per cent in the last five years. Eight in 10 GPs say they cannot provide safe, quality care as they struggle to keep up with demand. Indeed, increasing number of GP practices are opting to take the only course of action left to them, and are closing their lists to new patients, with a recent BMA survey showing that 54 per cent of practices are willing to do so.

What must not be forgotten is that behind each one of these missed targets are real patients who are suffering delays to their treatment, as well as families suffering anxiety and stress in waiting for care for their loved ones. The public, and our patients deserve better than this.

We know that the UK is spending significantly less on its health services as a proportion of GDP than that of other similar leading European countries. This gap in resource has led us to the situation the NHS faces today. The BMA is, therefore, calling for an overall increase in UK health spending to match that of other leading European economies; in 2015 this this would have meant an increase from 9.8 per cent of GDP being spent on health, to 10.4 per cent, or £10.3bn. This would mean the NHS would be £22.9bn better off in 2022/23, compared to current proposed levels of increase. This plea was repeated by the NHS Chief Executive in the recent days. Such an investment would make a tangible, positive difference to our health service, for example, if just half this additional money was invested in hospital beds it could pay for an extra 35,000 beds every day.
Ahead of the Budget, I urge you to commit the necessary funding to deliver on the Government’s responsibility to properly finance the NHS so that doctors can be enabled to deliver the care patients need and deserve.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Chaand Nagpaul CBE
BMA council chair