The Prime Minister  
Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA  

11 October 2019  

Dear Prime Minister,  

Queen’s Speech: the BMA’s manifesto for change  

As the only organisation to represent all doctors working across all sectors of the UK, the BMA is uniquely placed to help find the solutions to the problems facing the NHS and to develop a positive vision for what a caring, supportive and collaborative health and care system should look like. Ahead of your Government’s commitments for the next parliamentary session in the forthcoming Queen’s Speech, I urge you to make bold commitments that will empower those working in the NHS to provide the high-quality, safe, and accessible care which doctors want to provide to their patients.

The BMA has repeatedly warned that health services, across the UK, are struggling to cope and that doctors feel embattled by a system under chronic strain. After years of funding investment failing to match patient demand, doctors are left treating patients in an increasingly unsafe and unsupportive environment. Nine in 10 doctors tell us that staffing levels are not adequate, and that they work in a climate in which they are fearful that systemic pressures and lack of capacity will cause them to make an error.

A persistent culture of fear across the NHS, where blame stifles learning, contributes to the vicious cycle of low morale and poor rates of recruitment and retention. We know that doctors are leaving the profession due to a feeling of being undervalued – something that has been greatly exacerbated by punitive pension taxation hitting hardworking staff. The knock-on impact on patients and their care is undeniable.

I hope you will agree that change is clearly needed. In your Queen’s Speech, I urge you to listen to doctors’ experience and expertise and to deliver changes for the future of our NHS that will have real impact. I refer you to the BMA’s ‘manifesto for change’, in which we have highlighted our policy priorities to shape the country’s health services into a better system for all:

A valued workforce  

Pensions  
Scrap the punitive tax and pension regulations which are driving senior doctors out of the workforce. Without action, the staffing of services will be left in jeopardy.

Safe staffing  
Introduce legislation in England to ensure system-level accountability for staffing levels, which will make sure that patient care is safe and that individual clinicians are not blamed when the system places them under unmanageable pressure.
Pay
Deliver pay increases which truly value our medical workforce and help to retain staff. Commit to introducing a mechanism to address historic underpayments to doctors.

A supportive culture

Regulation
Give doctors and clinical staff adequate time and facilities to be able to reflect on their experiences. They must also be freed from the pressure of a regulatory system which seeks to blame, not learn.

CQC
Review the CQC’s regulatory framework with the intention of introducing reforms which will deliver a truly proportionate regulatory system, resulting in a revised approach to registration and inspection, and the removal of aggregate ratings.

GMC
Introduce amendments to the Medical Act to allow the GMC to streamline its fitness-to-practise processes, adapt their approach to the needs of the profession, and move away from a system which is inflexible, heavy handed and places great stress on doctors.

Management
Introduce a regulatory mechanism for senior NHS management which will ensure core skills and attributes are maintained alongside clear individual accountability and responsibility.

A collaborative structure

NHS funding
Address the funding gap by increasing spending across the UK by at least 4.1% per year to put the NHS on a sustainable long-term footing. This equates to an extra £9.5bn by 2023/24.

End wasteful competition
Deliver on the NHS’ desire to revoke legislation in England which has led to wasteful and detrimental competition in the NHS, and restore the NHS as the preferred provider of services. New procurement processes must be transparent.

IT
Invest in a comprehensive IT programme so that the NHS has access to the right IT equipment and facilities to provide the best care for patients. This includes basic IT infrastructure and access to high-speed broadband to enable true interoperability and the full digitalisation of all patient records.

In times of such uncertainty – with Brexit looming and the seasonal winter spike in demand nearly upon us – it is vital that your Government uses the opportunity presented on 14th October, and in the days thereafter, to deliver commitments that will shore up the long-term sustainability of the NHS, as well as dealing with the acute pressures facing doctors and their patients in the here and now.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Chaand Nagpaul CBE
BMA Council Chair