

## The Prime Minister

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

29 July 2019

Dear Prime Minister,

### **A caring, supportive, collaborative NHS of the future**

First, may I offer you my congratulations on your appointment. As the country's new Prime Minister, you will face huge challenges and carry a number of heavy responsibilities – one of the greatest of which is safeguarding our NHS. I would like to take this opportunity, as Chair of the British Medical Association, which represents the medical profession across the UK, to draw your attention to the most pressing problems facing doctors and our nation's health service. Addressing these key challenges will be vital to ensure that the right decisions are taken by your Government so that doctors are empowered by the NHS to provide high-quality, safe, and accessible care to patients, rather than embattled by a system under chronic strain.

We currently face the reality of severe all-year pressures in the NHS, in which waiting times are now routinely breaching the NHS constitution's promise to the population. This is impacting adversely on doctors who cannot achieve the impossible. A survey conducted as part of the BMA's flagship *Caring, Supportive, Collaborative* project, which I enclose, highlights that nine in ten doctors tell us that they are fearful of making a medical error due to working in an environment plagued by systemic pressures and lack of capacity. Nearly 50% fear they will be blamed for errors borne out of these conditions. This is bad for doctors and patients alike – we need a valued NHS workforce in which everyone feels part of a properly resourced team, with the right mix of skills and tools to do the job properly and with fair reward.

In your first speech as Prime Minister on Wednesday afternoon, you highlighted your wish to bring down waiting times for patients to see their GP. Fulfilling this welcome ambition will necessarily require action both to address the GP workforce crisis and the inadequate infrastructure of support in the community, which is currently impacting on primary care. The chair of the BMA's General Practitioners Committee will write to you separately on this point in due course.

The greatest immediate threat to our medical workforce capacity and, consequently, to patient services – such as the waiting time for a GP appointment or hospital procedure – is the punitive taxation rules affecting doctors, as I outlined in my letter to you of July 11. During the leadership



campaign, we welcomed your commitment to “fix” the lifetime allowance – but we also pointed out that the problems doctors face are exacerbated further by the annual allowance and tapered annual allowance. Without action by the Treasury to address the cumulative impact of these policies, doctors will have no choice but to reduce the amount of work they do for the NHS, or leave it entirely, to avoid unexpected tax bills that can be four, five, or even six figures in some cases.

The NHS already has 10,000 unfilled medical vacancies and we simply cannot afford to lose any more or for those staff we do have to reduce their availability, which is precisely what we are seeing as a result of current government taxation policy. We were unable to meet with the previous Chancellor on this issue and I call on you to ensure that the new Chancellor meets with us, as a matter of urgency, so that we can discuss the solutions we have repeatedly proposed.

Brexit is clearly at the forefront of your agenda. The BMA is alarmed at the prospect of a ‘no deal’ Brexit and we have repeatedly warned that such an outcome could have potentially catastrophic consequences across the NHS. Given these risks, I am urging you take every possible step to avoid ‘no-deal’. We remain convinced that no Brexit deal will ever deliver the kinds and range of benefits which the UK’s current membership of the EU confers on patients, the medical workforce, and health services across the UK and Europe. Now that more is known about Brexit’s potential impact, it remains the BMA’s view that the public should have the final say.

With so much at stake, I invite your Government to engage with the BMA as soon as possible as key decisions affecting the future of the NHS unfold. As frontline medics, we know what needs to change in order to ensure that the NHS is able to provide the best care possible to patients across the UK, and we would welcome the opportunity to work with your Government in the pursuit of this vital goal.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chaand Nagpaul". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C' and 'N'.

**Dr Chaand Nagpaul CBE**  
BMA Council Chair