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Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London, SW1A 2HQ

Thursday 25th February 2021

Dear Chancellor,

RE. Budget 2021/22: Supporting the NHS and healthcare workforce

Ahead of the Budget, I am writing to urge the Government to take action to support the NHS in its fight against COVID-19 and to ensure the UK has a health system that is able to support the country's economic recovery.

Central to this will be increasing core (non-COVID) NHS spending in the medium-to-long-term. At the very least this must mean annual real terms growth in core NHS funding of 4.1%¹ to ensure the NHS can cope with increasing demand and modernise services. This would take core health spend to £174bn by 2023/24. In addition, it is crucial that extra funding is also provided in the short-medium term to cope with the ongoing impact of COVID-19.

The NHS must also be given specific extra resources to tackle the additional challenge posed by a growing backlog of non-COVID care that continues to build. For example, the BMA estimates that between April and December 2020 there were between 989,000 and 1.3m fewer first elective treatments than would normally have been expected, potentially costing the NHS between £4bn and £5.4bn to work through. On top of this the waiting list for elective treatment now stands at 4.5 million, and over 224,000 people are waiting more than a year for treatment, a record high. This demonstrates the scale of the challenge facing the NHS over time and the need for a clear plan with dedicated funding to tackle the backlog and get waiting times down.

A significant part of the increase in investment must go towards funding the workforce of the future. The demands on the NHS workforce have been highlighted and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Burnout has led to significant numbers of medical professionals [considering leaving the profession](#) or reducing their working commitments, whilst the number of FTE days lost in secondary care due to mental health-related sickness absence is at its highest since March 2015. Twenty-six per cent of respondents to our February 2021 [COVID-19 tracker survey](#) said they were now more likely to take early retirement and

¹ As set out by projections from [IFS and Health Foundation](#) indicating at least an annual increase of 4.1% is needed to invest in and modernise the NHS and improve services such as meeting waiting time targets.



47% reported being more likely to reduce their hours. This means more doctors are urgently needed to look after the UK's population and to tackle the growing backlog on non-COVID care. Health Education England needs funding beyond the amount provided in the Spending Review in November 2020 to enable this to happen. [Estimates](#) suggest around 7,500 additional medical school places are required by 2023/24. [Data](#) from the DHSC's own estimates in 2017 suggests this amounts to an expenditure of at least £3.45bn per annum on medical school placements alone (requiring an increase of £1.72bn per year above current spending plans). This investment is needed now to ensure adequate numbers for the future given the significant time it takes to train doctors.

From the outset of the pandemic, our healthcare professionals have gone above and beyond to ensure patients get the care they need, often sacrificing their own physical and mental health as a result. Many colleagues have also sadly died in the line of duty merely by turning up for work to help their patients. It is vitally important that government recognises the sacrifices of all doctors fighting the pandemic and rewards them accordingly. As well as training more doctors, we must fairly reward and retain the ones we have. Since 2008, doctors have experienced a prolonged period of pay freezes, caps on increases and sub-inflationary increases. As a result, the medical profession has seen the biggest drop in pay compared to all other pay review body professions, with some doctors having seen an over 30 per cent fall in real terms take home pay. **The Government must commit to a significant pay uplift for all doctors across the UK, which goes well beyond the retail price index (RPI) inflation and helps address the real terms pay cuts.**

The COVID-19 pandemic is almost certainly going to have a lasting impact on people's mental health and wellbeing. Mental health providers are already [reporting](#) significant increases in demand and in the severity of new cases due to the pandemic. Our members themselves have also [disclosed](#) worryingly high levels of anxiety or depression. Their mental health has deteriorated significantly over the past year of this pandemic. **Mental health spending needs to be doubled in real terms over the period of the long-term plan to ensure mental health services are prepared and properly resourced, including investment in occupational health services for all staff working in the NHS** – and this includes GPs and their staff who do not have access to a comprehensive occupational health service. In addition, specific funding should be allocated to local authorities to substantially increase spending on local public mental health services.

It is crucial that public health services are invested in now to help cope with the impact of COVID-19, deliver the necessary measures to help us leave lockdown restrictions and to be better prepared for future pandemics. COVID-19 has demonstrated the importance of public health services, but they are significantly underfunded, with long term funding cuts having led to reduced services across a plethora of areas. Public health funding has shrunk by £850m in real terms compared with 2015/16, according to research by the Health Foundation and the King's Fund last year. The BMA is calling for an increase of £1bn to the public health grant to return funding to 2015/16 levels, with additional investment year on year increasing to £4.5bn by 2023/24, as well as a commitment to ensuring that the newly formed 'National Institute for Health Protection' (NIHP) is adequately resourced to ensure that our response to COVID-19, future pandemics and other hazards is as robust as possible.

We acknowledge your commitment to ensuring the Budget sets out the 'next phase of the plan to tackle the virus'. Ensuring the NHS has everything it needs to continue to tackle the impact of the pandemic now and into the future must be a key priority in achieving this. Investing in the NHS now will not only deliver a stronger health service but will support the UK's economic recovery and in the longer term ensure we are better prepared to deal with future public health threats.

The BMA's key spending asks are set in full detail in our submission to the [Comprehensive Spending Review 2020](#).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chaand Nagpaul', written in a cursive style.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul CBE
BMA council chair