

THE CHEMISTRY FOR SUCCESS



WHAT NEXT FOR THE NHS?

ELECTION SPECIAL

A year after the EU Referendum (the second general election in 25 months) the decision to call a snap election will make it even more difficult for the NHS to get on with change, particularly the re-configurations and other difficult decisions often involved in work to contain costs. These rely largely on the buy-in and support of politicians – something you don't see a lot of during election campaigns.

It may only be a matter of weeks before the election itself, but this is likely to be followed by more uncertainty surrounding new policy commitments, the forming of a government with a potential new Health Secretary, and a new set of priorities. Among the big issues likely to come to the fore are the following:

THE FIVE YEAR FORWARD VIEW

The timetable for implementation of the Five Year Forward View was linked to the 2015-20 election cycle. So what happens now?

DELAYS IN ACTION ON FINANCIAL SAVINGS AND SERVICE CHARGE

The election and political uncertainty will almost certainly provide reasons/excuses (delete as appropriate) for delaying change – just at a time when NHS England had begun to take a harder line on closing unsustainable services in certain areas, and was doing its best to pin down financial savings and plans for 2017-18. The danger is that many national initiatives may stumble before they even get off the starting blocks.

DELAYS IN APPOINTMENTS AND DECISIONS

A number of important national NHS posts have become or are due to become vacant in the next few months. The new Chair of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the new Chief Inspector of Hospitals at the Care Quality Commission are just two such examples. All of these could be delayed, particularly if the top job itself- Secretary of State for Health – becomes subject to change. These are major direction-setting roles across the NHS and any lag in filling these posts will inevitably slow the pace of progress.

The NHS nationally is also beginning a major programme to turnaround emergency care performance by lobbying for more social care capacity to free up beds – any delay in action on this front could have severe consequences.

POLITICAL COMMITMENTS AND FUNDING

With a strengthened Conservative majority government the most likely outcome, this general election could be seen as an opportunity to make, abandon and/or amend policy commitments contained in the previous party manifesto, including those affecting the NHS. Brexit will dominate the political agenda for the next two years at least and the Health Service will be a key factor in the ongoing debate, particularly the concern over the use of EU nationals as a substantial part of the clinical workforce. Funding and spending plans may be up in the air – there was an implicit expectation that the government would provide a pre-election boost in day-to-day NHS funding around 2018 or 2019, prior to the expected 2020 election date. This is no longer the case.

Health Service leaders have been going forward on the basis that there will be no major NHS legislation in this parliament - creating Sustainability and Transformation Plans, and various other policy workarounds. With a new parliament and a likely strengthened Conservative majority, there may be a major new Health Bill, which could throw all of the plans to date into the air. Brexit may occupy too much time for this to happen, but, if there is a new Secretary of State for Health, you wouldn't necessarily bet against it.

For more information or discuss any of the topics covered in this article, please don't hesitate to contact me.

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