

6 September 2022

The Rt. Hon. Prime Minister Liz Truss,
Prime Minister's Office,
10 Downing Street,
London,
SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

Health and energy crisis

We wish you congratulations on being elected to your new job, as Prime Minister of our country. As medical practitioners, individuals, and proud servants of our NHS, we feel we have both a professional and moral duty to emphasise to you our belief for what is one of the most concerning and avoidable health crises this country has ever faced, precipitated by the triple whammy of BREXIT, the pandemic and the Ukraine war.

This may seem a bold statement as we have just navigated through, though not yet eradicated, the worst excesses of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, we are gravely concerned that the ongoing cost-of-living debacle and the impending rise in fuel bills, could precipitate both physical and mental health mortality.

Being health professionals in such a developed and wealthy nation, we never anticipated having to treat patients for problems such as hypothermia and malnutrition. These are words more commonly associated with developing countries. However the reality is, the poorest are underfed and in very real danger of freezing to death in the coming winter (as homeless people have tragically done for the last few years in our communities).

At local level, the response to this need has, at times, been overwhelming, with donations to food banks and volunteering to care being at record levels. We have now reached a point where the poor are feeding the poorest and charity alone will not suffice.

Throughout the pandemic, the people of this country showed remarkable resilience in the face of anxieties not faced since the Second World War. This situation was bound to have an effect on mental health and colleagues report that up to 80% of their patients are now facing illnesses intrinsically linked to mental health.

Sadly, the situation has continued to worsen with new concerns around debt, paying household bills, universal debt and worries about pensions and lack of employment. The British sense of fortitude has been put to a very stern test indeed. Our response as front line health workers has been well intentioned but sometimes inadequate, since we lack the support of mental health specialists, counsellors and psychiatrists, resulting in an increasing reliance on the help of underfunded charities and voluntary organisations. Unchecked, this situation will lead to more cases of self-harm and suicide, and we have all noted a rise in mental health issues in children and young people.

Whilst we fully understand the need to bolster emergency care in the wake of Covid-19 and ensure that waiting lists for hospital procedures are reduced, we strongly urge more

investment at primary care level where surgeries are sinking under the weight of demand leading to wider health inequalities. We are doing all we can to promote self-care, running campaigns to stop smoking, eat healthier diets and do more exercise. However, no amount of individual responsibility can mitigate against the rising demands due to extraneous factors.

As we have all witnessed during the pandemic, our staff are supremely dedicated but we are now worried about their health too, as they strive to care whilst struggling with the demands of more patients and scant resource. That situation also applies to all aspects of secondary care and social care, which also need your support. Investment in primary care makes fiscal sense in that it reduces the burden of hospitalised care and ensures a better quality of life for all those affected.

We will, as you witnessed during the pandemic, continue to perform our duties with precision, dedication, duty and care. Despair is not an option. However, we do call on you to deploy more resource into primary care and do more to assuage the suffering of the poorest in our society.

Prime Minister, we have just managed an unprecedented health crisis in two years of Covid-19, let us ensure that we now conquer equally desperate but infinitely more avoidable issues, together.

Yours sincerely,

Principal signatories:

Dr Zahid Chauhan OBE, FRCGP and Labour Councillor for Oldham MBC.

Professor Donna Hall CBE

Dr Aseem Malhotra, Consultant Cardiologist and Health Campaigner

Professor J S Bamrah CBE, Chair of BAPIO and Consultant Psychiatrist

Dr Amir Hannan MBE, GP Chair, Association of Greater Manchester Local Medical Committees

Dr Tariq Chauhan MBBS, FRCS, FRCGP