

## THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

The Government is firmly committed to the National Health Service. It has been made abundantly clear that more resources have been made and will be available to protect and improve health care to all.

As the **Prime Minister** said:

'Let me make one thing absolutely clear. The National Health Service is safe with us. As I said in the House of Commons on December 1st last: "The principle that adequate health care should be provided for all regardless of ability to pay, must be the foundation of any arrangement for financing the Health Service." We stand by that' (Brighton, 8th October 1982).

### Resources

Expenditure on the NHS will have grown from £7,750 million in 1978-9 to £15,500 million in 1983-4. Thus spending on the NHS will have increased by about 17.5 per cent in real terms between 1978-9 and 1983-4 (*Hansard*, 25th March 1983, Col. 1247).

This extra money means:-

- In 1982 the NHS in England was employing about 45,000 more nurses and midwives (whole time equivalent) and over 5,000 more doctors and dentists, including 1,250 more family doctors, than in 1978.
- The ratios of staff to patients in mental illness and mental handicap hospitals and in hospitals for old people have continued to improve.
- Between 1978 and 1981 - the latest date for which figures are available - over 500,000 more in-patients and day cases were treated in our hospitals and over 1½ million more out-patients, accident and emergency attendances.
- Nearly 400,000 more people were visited in their own homes by district nurses and health visitors.
- New medical advances - like hip replacement operations which were once unusual - have become much more common.
- Capital expenditure has increased by 15 per cent in real terms in the period 1978-9 to 1982-3. In contrast capital spending was cut back under the last Labour Government by 35 per cent in real terms.

### Greater Efficiency

The Government believes that it is not enough simply to pour extra resources into the NHS without taking steps to improve efficiency and effectiveness. The Government has therefore taken a range of initiatives to cut back on unnecessary bureaucracy in order to release further resources to patient care. The health authority structure (in England) has been streamlined; annual regional reviews have been introduced; a management inquiry has been set up; and performance indicators, manpower planning and policy scrutinies have also been introduced.

As part of the Government's policy to make the NHS more cost effective, a draft circular was issued in February 1983 under which health authorities would be asked to test the cost effectiveness of three support services - cleaning, laundry and catering. Contracts in these services are to be put out to tender so that private commercial contractors may compete with in-house labour services on a market basis. Any money saved from this will also go to increasing patient care.

## Mental Health

The Government has singled out for special priority the needs of the mentally ill and mentally handicapped. The emphasis of Government policy has been to shift the balance of care in mental health from long-stay hospitals which are generally regarded as being unsuitable for most mentally ill and handicapped people, and in particular children, to greater provision of care in the community.

In *Care in the Community*, a consultative document issued by the DHSS in July 1981, it was estimated that 15,000 mentally handicapped people and up to 5,000 mentally ill patients could be discharged from hospitals into the community if the necessary services were available.

To encourage health authorities to accelerate the discharging of mentally handicapped children the Government is providing £3 million this year and similar sums over the next two years. However, as a report by a Conservative Policy Group in Mental Health, chaired by the Party Chairman, Mr Cecil Parkinson, stated:

'It makes little sense for patients to be returned to the community if large amounts of existing resources are to remain confined exclusively to hospitals' (*The Right Approach to Mental Health* 1981).

To this end the Government has increased the amount allocated for joint finance – money channelled from the NHS to local government personal social services and voluntary organisations – from £34.5 million in 1978-9 under Labour to £96 million in 1983-4, an increase of 51 per cent in real terms. Gross spending on personal social services in England and Wales has expanded from £1.4 billion in 1978-9 to £2.4 billion in 1981-2 – an increase well ahead of the rise in prices. Day care places and multi-purpose centres for the mentally ill have risen by almost 4,000 to 19,600.

For those who benefit from remaining in hospital the Government has taken steps in the Mental Health (Amendment) Act 1982 to protect the legal rights and treatment of in-patients. As Mr Norman Fowler, Secretary of State for Social Services, explained to Parliament, the Act:

'will remove the uncertainties of the law, clarify the position of staff who care for detained patients and improve and add to the safeguards of patients. The Bill will halve the time before a patient's detention in hospital or period under guardianship has to be reviewed by a mental review tribunal' (*Hansard*, 6th November 1981, Col. 221).

## Private Medicine

The Government has continued to emphasise the contribution the private sector can make to increasing total health care as well as relieving the strain on NHS resources. Some four million are now covered by private insurance policies. The private sector also yields valuable resources to the NHS: the estimated revenue from pay beds in England in 1981-2 was £52.5 million (*Hansard*, 28th July 1982, *WA*, Col. 558). Government policy is to build on a partnership of private and public provision to the benefit of patients. Mr Fowler has written:

'We welcome every contribution to the sum of patient care. We do not accept for one moment that to support the private sector is to attack the public sector' (*Guardian*, 14th February 1983).

The Government's record speaks for itself. Far from 'destroying' the NHS, as the Opposition claim, the Government has created a more effective health service, better able to face the increasing demands put upon it.

CD/JLS