

This week in the Patients Association Weekly News:

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The Budget - our submission to the Treasury



We have made our formal submission to the Treasury, ahead of the Budget on March 11th. In it, we focus on the three core messages from our submission to last year's spending round, and that we raised in our letters to the Prime Minister and Chancellor when they took office: the urgent need to fix the social care crisis; the NHS funding gap not covered by previous announcements; and creating a strategic approach to health, care and wellbeing across the whole of government.

Like all our submissions to government, it is available in the Policy Directory of our website.

[Read our full submission](#)

Getting involved - we need you!



We currently have two surveys on the go, so please do take some time out to give us your feedback if you haven't already done so. Without your involvement we wouldn't be able to collate meaningful data.

Thank you – and please share the surveys with your colleagues, friends and families!

Food in hospitals - closing Sunday!

THE NHS SERVES OVER
140,000,000
MEALS EACH YEAR

Tell us what you think of hospital food

This is your last chance to take part - and it's an important one.

The NHS Hospital Food Review was launched last year, and they asked us to be the patient voice by collecting your opinions and experiences of hospital catering to feed into their work. If you have been in hospital recently, please take a moment to complete this survey. It won't take more than five minutes and will help inform the Panel ahead of the publication of their review later this year.

[Take the survey](#)

From hospital into care



Discharging your loved ones from hospital and into care can be a very difficult time and we want to find out just how stressful the impact is on family and close friends. We need to collate your experiences, whether good, bad or indifferent, so if you do have any information to share please take a couple of minutes to fill out this quick survey.

[Take the survey](#)

Spotlight on digital health



Putting patients at the heart of digital health policy

Digital technologies are rapidly evolving and, as a result, so is UK digital health policy. It is vital that patients are put at the heart of this policy and we intend to do as much as we can to make that happen.

So, this week we convened a group of senior executives from relevant charities, royal colleges, health sector bodies and technology companies, including Macmillan, the Royal College of Radiologists and NHSX. We believe this is the first serious effort to get all different types of organisation around the same table on this issue.

Our CEO Rachel Power chaired the discussion and highlighted the importance of securing and maintaining public trust, improving understanding of public needs and perceptions of digital health, and ensuring the NHS can make the best possible use of digital technologies.



Healthtech conference

Also this week, the Health Tech Alliance, a coalition of health technology companies and stakeholders from across the NHS and wider health system, hosted their 'Parliament & Healthtech' conference.

The keynote speech was given by Secretary of State Matt Hancock, and Rachel was invited to be on the panel discussing 'driving the uptake of vital innovation'.

Commenting on the two events, Rachel said:

"The spotlight is definitely on digital health and we must make sure that patients are at the heart of new policies and practices as they are developed.

"Our work at the Patients Association will help give a stronger voice for patient priorities in the ongoing debate around digital-driven health technologies."

Monthly news from our helpline



 the patients association

**Calls to our
helpline are now
free of charge!**

We've launched our new
0800 number, making it
free for people to speak
to our expert advisers:

0800 345 7115

January is a busy time for the helpline team, particularly with questions on GP practices and getting appointments generally. It is the time of year when many of us suffer from health issues, and we want to get treated as soon as possible.

However, it appears to be becoming increasingly difficult to get appointments and we are noticing how many frustrated patients we hear from.

The root cause of this is the well documented combination of rising levels of patient need, as the population ages, and a shortage of GPs. Practices are using numerous methods to try to manage the levels of demand they are experiencing. In some, receptionists are being asked to triage patients if possible, for instance to a pharmacist or practice nurse in the first instance. In many, patients calling their practice in the morning when it opens are treated on a 'first call, first appointment' basis and often there are not enough free appointments to fulfil demand. In some cases, online booking systems have recently been introduced, which can make it seem as though it is the online system that is the problem – which is sometimes true, but sometimes just masks underlying shortages of GP time.

Our helpline team are very experienced in handling these calls and of course respond to each patient experience on an individual basis.

This week we received a call from Tony* wanting to make a complaint about being asked to use such a system.

Tony has heart trouble and had been advised by his GP to book an appointment to see a specialist for an EEG (electroencephalogram). Unfortunately, when he went to make the appointment, the booking system informed him that he faced a waiting time of two months. Very concerned, he contacted his local hospital only to be told that they did in fact have availability in the next few days. This left Tony relieved of course, but also furious that his GP had suggested such an inefficient service for his referral.

We advised Tony to contact the practice manager to raise his concerns before making an official complaint. In the event of not receiving a satisfactory response, we informed him of the complaints process and directed him to the advice leaflet on our website which you can download [here](#).

Finally, we told Tony about the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and how he could contact them if necessary.
*Name changed for privacy

[Contact our helpline](#)

What our team is reading this week

[Safety in health and social care](#)

[Seriously ill wait more than hour for ambulance](#)

[Better tech not a 'nice to have' but 'vital to have' for the NHS](#)

[Nurses have been invisible and undervalued for far too long](#)

[NHS may use people's phone data to predict mental health issues](#)

About Us

Our vision is that health and social care will be delivered in a way that meets every person's health and social care needs.

Our mission is to give effect to the patient voice, to improve patient experience and support people to engage fully in their own care. Find out more about our values on our [website](#).

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