



The NHS winter crisis and the Prime Minister's run-in with GPs

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The weekend of 14 January saw general practice and Theresa May come to blows over claims about the impact of GP opening hours on accident and emergency attendances. This story broke as the Government sought to quell reports of a 'humanitarian crisis' in the NHS and tensions between NHS England's Chief Executive and Number 10 Downing Street. We have produced a timeline of recent events for those who would like a reminder of who said what and when:

Friday 6 January

The Red Cross reports that the NHS faces a humanitarian crisis, citing among other indicators the fact that two patients died on trolleys in Worcestershire Royal Hospital.

Sunday 8 January

Theresa May gives a keynote interview to Sky News, downplaying the crisis and reiterating her claim that the NHS has had more money than it asked for (see 11:30 into this clip).

Monday 9 January

Jeremy Hunt makes a statement to the House of Commons on mental health and NHS performance, citing 'unprecedented demand' and listing the Government's measures for handling the crisis, including 'temporarily releasing time for GPs to support urgent care work'.

Wednesday 11 January, 05:00

The Times carries a front-page story reporting a rift between Number 10 Downing Street and Sir Simon Stevens, the Chief Executive of NHS England, citing sources who say Stevens 'lacks enthusiasm'.

Wednesday 11 January, 12:00

At Prime Minister's Questions Theresa May continues attributing the NHS's problems to factors other than money, saying: 'There are always extra pressures on the NHS during the winter but, of course, we have at the moment those added pressures of the ageing population and the growing complex needs of the population.'

Wednesday 11 January, 16:00

Later that afternoon Simon Stevens appears before Parliament's Public Accounts Select Committee, saying that claiming the NHS is getting more money than it asked for is 'stretching it' and uses an analogy comparing the complexity of the NHS to the simplicity of the criminal justice system (Theresa May's previous ministerial brief was at the Home Office).

Thursday 12 January

Simon Stevens's remarks lead many newspaper front pages and news bulletins, the crisis of demand on NHS services continues.

Saturday 14 January

Number 10 briefs journalists that the lack of GPs providing extended opening hours is causing patients to go to A&E because they cannot get GP appointments at a convenient time. They say that the Government will cut funding to GPs who are not providing extended access. This is the lead item on several Saturday newspaper front pages.

Sunday 15 January

GPs and opposition politicians take to traditional and social media to rebut the Government's claims, many GPs voice their upset at being

scapegoated by the Prime Minister:

Jeremy Corbyn, the Leader of the Opposition, cites a recent visit to a GP surgery in his constituency on the Andrew Marr show (see 45:25 into this clip). This visit was arranged by Londonwide LMCs as part of our work to raise London MPs' awareness of the challenges general practice faces.

Dr Helen Stokes-Lampard, Chair of the RCGP appears on ITV's Peston on Sunday to defend the profession (see 17:30 into this clip, free registration required)

Dr Sarah Wollaston, Chair of the Health Select Committee and a former GP, appears on Sky News's Sophy Ridge show, saying GPs are working very hard and disputing Theresa May's claim that the NHS has had more money than it asked for.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul, Chair of the BMA's GPC, appears on BBC News saying "GPs already work 24/7, 365 days a year".

Monday 16 January

Dr Stokes-Lampard and Dr Wollaston's comments are widely reported. Through the start of the week GPs and the medical professional continues to express their anger at the Government's remarks and contest the factual basis of them, including:

Dr Michelle Drage, Chief Executive of Londonwide LMCs

Cumbria LMC

Dr Mark Porter, Chair of the BMA

Dr Zoe Norris, Chair of the GPC Sessional Subcommittee, BMA

Wednesday 18 January

The Department of Health says that they do not hold records on A&E attendances resulting from people not being able to get a timely GP appointment, in response to a written question by an opposition MP.