

# The NHS is broken, declares Starmer

One in five goes to A&E because they cannot get a GP appointment, claims Labour leader

By Laura Donnelly

THE NHS is "broken", Sir Keir Starmer has said, as he claims that a fifth of A&E patients go to hospital because they cannot get a GP appointment.

The Labour leader accused the Conservatives of presiding over a "cycle of decline" that could bring the NHS to an end. Research by Labour suggests that about 4.5 million patients in England went to A&E last year because they could not get a GP appointment.

Speaking to *The Daily Telegraph*, Sir Keir also accused the Prime Minister of "sitting on his hands" as the risks from further health strikes grow.

He insisted that he saw "no political advantage" from the unions' actions, saying he was particularly fearful about the risks to the public if doctors embark on more walkouts.

Sir Keir also said that Labour would back single-sex wards for hospital patients, and refused to say whether he thinks he should take personal responsibility for the failure to prosecute Jimmy Savile while he was director of public prosecutions, in the wake of a series of personal attack ads on Rishi Sunak.

"I think the NHS is broken," he said. "There's been one way of doing things for the last 13 years, and this is where we've ended up now with the NHS."

Labour claimed its A&E data show the "collapse of general practice" and poor use of taxpayers' resources, with emergency hospital visits costing the NHS up to nine times as much as a GP slot.

The findings are based on polling of 1,500 adults carried out by Redfield & Wilton Strategies, which found 18 per cent of patients attending A&E did so because they could not get a GP appointment in time.

Calling for a major reform of the health service, Sir Keir said far too much money was being wasted because people are unable to access local services, especially GPs.

It follows research from the Office for National Statistics that found one in

four patients was unable to book a GP appointment the last time they tried.

Sir Keir set out a case for the "reform and rebuilding" of healthcare, with "Neighbourhood Health Services" tailored to local communities, instead of a centralised NHS.

He claimed the future of the NHS is in jeopardy under the Conservatives, saying: "If they carry on like this it can't survive; the biggest risk to the NHS is another Tory government."

The Government hit back, with ministers saying Labour's own plans for the NHS could waste £15 billion.

Sir Keir made the comments as the Royal College of Nursing prepares for its most extreme strikes in NHS history.

Wes Streeting, the Labour health spokesman, said he was "really frightened" about the impact when nurses abandon A&E units, cancer services and critical care.

Further data show people calling 999 for an ambulance endured waits of more than 90 minutes before calls were picked up in December. The NHS data, revealed under Freedom of Information disclosures, show the longest wait was an hour and 37 minutes, in Yorkshire.

In the West Midlands, there was one delay of more than three hours for a 111 call to be picked up. At some points this winter, half of the calls to 111 were abandoned as services became overwhelmed, official data show.

Mr Streeting said that it was "unacceptable" that calling for an ambulance increasingly felt like a "terrifying" matter of "pot luck".

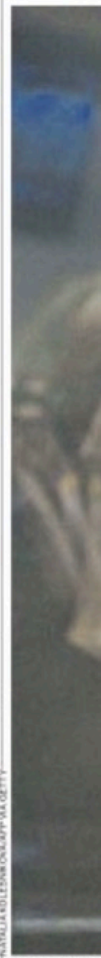
Sir Keir also said his party would be "at the forefront of women's rights", including single-sex wards for hospital patients, based on biological sex.

The NHS guidance on single-sex accommodation, which is under review, says trans patients should be accommodated on male or female wards according to their wishes, such as preferred pronouns.

Earlier this month, the Labour leader sought to clarify his stance on

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