

Dear colleagues,

It is an immense privilege to write to you as the new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

Before anything else, I want to thank you.

Not in the routine way politicians often do, but properly and sincerely.

You are keeping the NHS functioning during one of the most difficult periods in its history.

You are doing it while dealing with rising demand, workforce shortages, exhausted infrastructure, financial pressure, social care delays, industrial tensions and constant organisational change.

I know many of you feel tired, undervalued, uncertain about the future, and ...

...too many feel decisions are made around you, rather than with you.

I understand that.

The NHS has extraordinary people, but extraordinary people cannot indefinitely compensate for systems that are too fragmented, too bureaucratic and too slow to adapt.

That has to change.

Over the coming months the government will begin the transfer of responsibilities from NHSE into the DH+.

I want to be open about what that means.

This is not simply an organisational reshuffle. It is a significant change in how the NHS is led, how decisions are made and how accountability will work.

I know many of you will have concerns, particularly those working in management, operational leadership and support roles.

Let me say this clearly...

Good management is not bureaucracy.

Good management is infrastructure.

The NHS does not function without skilled people organising services, managing risk, planning workforce, running operations, handling finance and turning policy into practical reality.

We will need excellent managers and excellent clinicians working together if this period of change is to succeed.

There will undoubtedly be difficult decisions ahead. I will not pretend otherwise, but...

... I also believe the NHS now, has an opportunity to become simpler, clearer and more focused.

Too often frontline staff feel trapped between overlapping organisations, conflicting priorities and layers of administration that slow decisions and obscure accountability.

We need to create a system where people know:

who is responsible,

what the priorities are,

and how decisions are made.

At the same time, I do not want a health service run entirely from Whitehall.

The best ideas in the NHS rarely begin in government offices. They begin in wards, clinics, practices, community teams and local leadership.

Part of our challenge is to create a system with clearer national accountability while protecting local initiative, professional judgement and innovation.

We also need to speak honestly about technology and AI.

These technologies will transform healthcare. I know transformation is not something that happens because ministers use the word ‘innovation’ in speeches.

Many NHS staff still work with outdated systems that make daily work harder than it should be.

Technology must reduce frustration, improve patient care and support staff, not simply become another centrally imposed programme.

And where technology changes roles or ways of working, we must support people properly through that transition.

The NHS cannot modernise by making staff fearful about the future.

Finally, I want to say something about trust.

I know trust in national leadership has been damaged over many years by repeated restructures, changing priorities and promises that did not always match operational reality.

I cannot promise there will be no difficulties ahead. There will be.

But I can promise this

we will try to speak honestly about the challenges,  
we will listen more carefully to the experience of staff,  
and we will judge reform not by announcements, but by whether life becomes better for patients and staff.

The NHS remains one of this country’s greatest achievements.

Not because it is perfect, but ...

... because every day, millions of people in it continue, despite the pressures, to do remarkable things for others.

Thank you for what you do.

James Murray  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care