

ELECTION 2017: The NHS – a crisis without solution?

By [Will Leafe](#), Deputy Politics Editor (2016/17)

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WHEN ONE considers the idea of the ‘political football’, the National Health Service is perhaps the first issue which springs to mind. The strain of many years of kicking it back and forth between the red and blue teams may finally be about to tell.

After five years of training and rigorous exams, Holly, a newly qualified Junior Doctor, is deeply anxious of what is to come. “The NHS in its current state does not have a long term future, it is simply unsustainable. Throwing money at it will not solve the deep-rooted problems that are causing the service to be stretched beyond its limits.”

A reaction against the contract dispute between the deeply unpopular Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt and the Junior Doctors have seen many threaten to take their UK-trained skills abroad, a trend which would deeply wound already perilously low numbers. Perhaps picking a fight with some of the country’s most intelligent students was not the Secretary of State or the Conservatives’ most politically shrewd move, with many feeling that Mr. Hunt only remains in his position due to a lack of any budding Conservative minister willing to take over a chalice which seems to have been indefinitely poisoned.

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Having promised to immediately stop hospital closures should they form the next Government on June 9th, Labour have made the issue the focal point of their campaign, hoping to rekindle voters’ trust in their ability to protect the NHS from what could otherwise see its downfall.

The Liberal Democrats have been quick to declare that the NHS is in crisis, citing the “critical funding and capacity challenges” the service faces, which threaten the possibility that it can “carry on delivering for future generations”. However, the party’s main focus, along with Caroline Lucas and Jonathan Bartley’s Greens, on securing a second referendum on the Brexit deal, may distract from their policies on the health service.

“We believe in a health service free at the point of use” is the answer returned when asking any of UKIP’s senior figures whether they’re in favour of privatisation. One of the party’s ‘five pledges’ ahead of the 2017 Election, however, declares that they will put the “NHS before foreign aid”, with plans to fund 20 000 nurses and 10 000 GPs. The party has also pledged to scrap hospital parking fees, a policy many would welcome.

Regardless of those who are elected to represent their constituencies on 8 June, and irrespective of which party will be invited to form a government, it is the patients, doctors, nurses and surgeons where this debate must be focalised. The words we must all bear in mind are those of our incoming Junior Doctors, who are anxious and scared about the state of the Health Service they will inherit.

Holly concludes: "I'm not sure everyone appreciates how close we are to losing it."



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