

Jeremy Hunt the great survivor

Being Health Secretary is a poisoned chalice. Even so Jeremy Hunt, survivor of many political storms, has eclipsed Aneurin Bevan and Norman Fowler to become Britain's longest-serving minister in that post: five years and 274 days to be exact (Monday 4 June 2018). A tweet Hunt sent marking the anniversary had an irenic tone: 'Thanks #NHS for being extraordinary in so many ways: much more impressive than a long Health Sec are the staff who have devoted 10, 15, or 20+ yrs to patients'. With the 70th anniversary of the NHS coming, what can we expect next?

The Guardian 5 June 2018. bit.ly/2kUMRJw

Health deficits

The healthcare funding crisis deepens. NHS trusts in England have reported a combined financial deficit that was nearly twice the amount planned. There was a deficit of £960m in the last financial year compared with the £496m they had planned for, according to the regulator NHS Improvement. Acute hospitals were largely responsible, mainly because of increased patient demand. All other providers, including ambulance and mental health trusts, had collectively underspent, it added. The latest reported deficit is reached after taking account of extra financial support provided by the government. *BBC News* 31 May 2018. bbc.in/2M4PB3o

Churches, health and social care

A report from the Cinnamon Network has put a cash value on the contribution of churches to health and social care: £3 billion a year. Some 3,500 churches and 200,000 volunteers are working in health and social care initiatives. The report profiles ten examples of church-led projects. The Bishop of London Sarah Mullally commented: 'The Church's impact on health and care research is an important contribution to understanding how the voluntary sector and specifically the church and faith-based projects can promote health and create community. *LocalGov* 31 May 2018. bit.ly/2sKhPHH

Heading off Ebola

It's back. The Ebola virus has struck the Democratic Republic of Congo. It's notoriously hard to predict where it might appear next. The 2014-18 West African epidemic took 11,000 lives and infected another 28,000. So are we in for a repeat of this terrible health catastrophe? Not likely, says Dr Charlie Weller, Head of Vaccines at the Wellcome Trust. 'A swift and well-co-ordinated response can ensure disease is contained early on, so as few people as possible become ill and die,' he said. *BBC News* 14 May 2018. bbc.in/2sB7LS1

Universities and mental health

Mental illness is the 'single biggest public health issue for universities,' says Head of Bristol University. Dr Hugh Brady was reflecting on a spate of suspected suicides at the university. One trigger, he said, was how social media creates a 'drive for perfectionism with mobile phones a key factor; taking a toll on well-being. I do worry about the sheer volume of sensory input they are receiving from their mobile devices. You are no longer allowed to have a bad day on social media, you have to be seen to be happy.' *iNews* 29 May 2018. bit.ly/2J1RP1o

ID check pilot underwhelms

How many illegal immigrants are there in Britain? How many health tourists? Research shows that many Britons routinely over-estimate the numbers involved, not least because of strident social media pundits. A pilot study of eleven London NHS trusts found that just 50 patients were found to be ineligible for free treatment of the 8,900 who had their ID checked. The government hopes checks will recover £500m by 2017/18. A forlorn hope it seems. Former BMA chair Dr Mark Porter had warned the pilot could 'demonise overseas patients or sow chaos and confusion within the NHS'.

Evening Standard 29 May 2018. bit.ly/2IXBk6x

Talking about more than football

Apparently, Middlesbrough in England's north-east is said to have the highest suicide rate among males. Three in four suicides in the region are men. A local charity, Men Tell Health, is trying to combat this trend with coffee and conversation. Its founder Gary Pollard observed, 'Men go to the pub and talk about football but don't actually sit down and talk'. It takes a lot to get them to open up. We're talking nonsense half the time. Sometimes it can take a few sessions, but they do,' he said. *BBC News* 1 June 2018.

bbc.in/2M2H2Gj

The friend effect

An Oxford study has found that regularly eating meals alone is the biggest single factor for unhappiness, besides existing mental illness. Why is hanging out with friends so helpful? A new study by Oxford Economics found, for instance, that people who eat alone are much less happy than people in shared meals. Why? 'We simply don't know', says Robin Dunbar a psychology professor. But, he says, it is clear that eating together is a regular social ritual, a moment of 'union and communion' in otherwise chaotic lives.

The Guardian 23 May 2018. bit.ly/2KMEHOR

Nuffield study on waiting times

A Nuffield survey has found that one in ten people living in England's north-east aged over 60 have waited in excess of 18 weeks for diagnostic tests or operations. A third said this had had an effect on their mental health. Waiting, the survey found, left people 'scared', 'anxious' and 'stressed' and meant they needed to 'put their lives on hold.' A fifth reported deterioration in their health while waiting for operations or test results. *Chronicle Live* 30 May 2018. bit.ly/2JrO2y7

Readmission rates a worry

Better care in hospital and after discharge could significantly reduce readmissions with conditions such as pneumonia and pressure sores according to a Nuffield study. It found emergency readmissions, within 30 days of discharge, have risen by a fifth over the past seven years. Nuffield found that a small and growing proportion of emergency readmissions - around 1% - were preventable, affecting 185,000 people last year. Emergency readmissions for pressure sores almost trebled to 22,448 while patients readmitted with blood clots in a vein (venous thromboembolism) increased by a third. *BBC News* 1 June 2018.

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