

There is evidence that in at least one part of the coun...

Published: January 15, 2026, 9:56 am

This comes from a [very recent article by James Meek posted to the London Review of Books](#). I recommend that all those interested in the NHS read the full piece:

In the year of its seventieth anniversary, the 1.3 million people who work for the National Health Service in England find themselves in a surreal situation. They're effectively working within two realities at once, expected simultaneously to inhabit an NHS universe where a radical, highly optimistic reform programme is under way, and a second universe in which the organisation is unmistakably close to breakdown.

In universe one, the NHS will be upturned to give most of the healthcare people need at home or on their doorstep and admit to the big hospitals only patients with major trauma, or suffering diseases that demand intensive care, or complex surgical or biochemical expertise. Big hospitals are to become centres of research, high technology, rare skills and dramatic, life-saving interventions. Everything else will be diffused to the community. Loosely directed by the head of NHS England, Simon Stevens, money, staff and new investment are being directed towards primary care — family doctors, community nurses, souped-up local clinics, systems to help the chronically unwell live at home.

In universe two a counter-reality prevails: the reality of winter, the reality of need, the reality of an ever increasing number of frail, elderly people converging on the help of last resort, the emergency hospital. This winter, as last winter, the system of emergency medical care in England came to the brink of collapse, with untold knock-on effects for the health system as a whole. There is evidence that in at least one part of the country, the east of England, the emergency system just plain broke.

Politicians may claim otherwise: I believe this narrative and think it well worth sharing.

Hat tip: Andy Crow