

Wes Streeting: the undertaker to the NHS

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Wes Streeting was being his usual self this weekend when talking without any obvious comprehension of the meaning of what he was saying at the [Financial Times Weekend festival in London on Saturday](#).

He said that:

the new government would prioritise moving NHS treatment “from hospital to community”, “analogue to digital” and “sickness to prevention”. The three shifts “are absolutely necessary, and actually existential . . . for the future of the NHS”.

So, GPs are going to be the priority, even though there are many fewer of them now than a decade ago, and they are already being overwhelmed by demand, making it incredibly difficult to both recruit and retain them.

Then there is the nod to Tony Blair and his obsession with AI, which is obligatory from senior Starmer ministers these days. Good luck with that when no one has as yet got the NHS onto a single digital platform, and neither are they likely to do so.

But the third point is the most interesting. Streeting wants to talk about prevention. If he is to prevent ill health in this country, he has to do a number of things, of which by far the most important are:

- * Reducing massively the consumption of sugar.
- * Reducing, as a part of that goal, but also because of its impact on A&E demand, the consumption of alcohol.
- * Seriously increasing the amount of exercise we take before and during old age to stop people from falling over as they get older.
- * Treating people holistically so that vast numbers of drugs to treat single issues, many of which are the side effects of the over-consumption of sugar and alcohol when combined with a lack of exercise, are not prescribed when they, in turn, create massive medical risks that create inordinate cost whilst ultimately harming individual wellbeing.

In other words, he has to take on the sugar lobby, the alcohol lobby and big pharma whilst promoting something as simple as walking. He would also have to change the prescribing culture of medicine and ask that it treat the causes and not the consequences of excess consumption. If he did that, demand for NHS services would fall significantly. So, too, would the cost of the NHS fall dramatically.

But will Streeting take the steps necessary to make these changes? Of course, he will not: Labour is in hock to big sugar, alcohol and pharma, and so, of course, he is going to do nothing to challenge them. But in that case, he says the existence of the NHS is in doubt. If it is, it will be his inaction on the causes of ill health and the costs the NHS is incurring as a result that will bring it to his knees.

It would seem that Wes Streting is less the Health Secretary and more the undertaker in waiting of the NHS. His delivery of it to the private sector to provide health care to a few at a cost to many will, no doubt, make him a wealthy man. However, that plan that seems deeply embedded in him is the last thing that this country needs.