

# Cost of energy crisis piles more pressure on UK's National Health Service and social care

Rory Woods, Richard Tyler  
9 September 2022

Surging energy bills running into additional millions pose a direct threat to patients' treatment in UK hospitals and resident's wellbeing in care homes.

Rory Deighton, the senior acute lead of the NHS Confederation, representing National Health Service trusts across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, explained, "This isn't an abstract problem, as the gap in funding from rising inflation will either have to be made up by fewer staff being employed, longer waiting times for care, or other areas of patient care being cut back."

The NHS is already in a perilous situation because of years of underfunding, staff shortages and privatisation, further worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still placing a major burden on health and care services.

Experts fear hospital admissions will rise due to soaring inflation and resulting widespread fuel poverty, with many households forced to choose between heating and eating. The NHS Confederation has warned that fuel poverty means thousands of excess deaths this coming winter in a "humanitarian crisis". As NHS trusts already starved of adequate funding are forced to slash patient care to pay for soaring energy bills, this "humanitarian crisis" will turn into a social catastrophe.

An investigation initiated by the *BMJ* (formerly, *British Medical Journal*) has found that rising energy prices will cost hospitals millions more each month. Many health trusts estimate energy costs will rise by up to 200-300 percent over the coming period, putting enormous pressures on hospital budgets. For example, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS trusts, which runs seven hospitals, told the *BMJ* it faced a 110 percent hike on the electricity and gas bills it had paid in early 2022. The trust is anticipating it will have to pay an additional £2 million a month from the beginning of 2023.

A Freedom of Information (FOI) request by the *Metro* newspaper found a similar situation at Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust, one of the busiest in the country, which expected its energy bills to rise by £4 million in the next financial year.

Since the government's energy "cap" only applies to private households, health and care providers are exposed to the full surge in energy prices. As well as hospitals, local GP surgeries—which since the "reforms" introduced by the Cameron Conservative government in 2012 have had full responsibility for their own budgets—face eye-watering increases.

Doctors worry that without additional financial support to cover higher gas and electricity bills, cuts to staff or services could be unavoidable.

Dr. Paul Evans, a GP partner at Bridges Medical Practice in Gateshead, told *gponline.com* his energy bills could jump 50 percent this year. If doctors are forced to reduce their drawings from the practice to cover this, it would equate to "a real terms cut to partners' pay" and more partners leaving the profession.

"Practices will cut expenses, maybe not covering holidays with a locum, maybe replacing expensive staff with cheaper ones; there's only so far that partners' incomes can fall," Dr. Evans said.

The situation is equally dire in the social care sector. According to the National Care Association, representing small and medium-sized care providers, some facilities are predicting tenfold increases or higher in their energy bills, the effect of which would be "devastating".

A care home whose fixed-term contract for electricity for the last two years amounted to roughly £20,000 per annum faces new charges of about £125,000 a year. The manager told the *i* newspaper this would mean

residents being charged an additional £100 a week.

The four homes in Scarborough belonging to the Saint Cecilia's Care Group spent £67,929 on gas in 2021. Managing director Mike Padgham told the paper that he anticipated this cost would rise to £166,637 for 2022, a 145 percent price hike. The electricity bill was expected to balloon by 90 percent.

"I've been [in] the sector 33 years. This is the toughest bit that I've known in that. It's almost as challenging, if not more so, than Covid," he said.

In Wales, some health boards are anticipating rises of at least 200 percent, a crippling increase in running costs. Similarly in Scotland, the health system faces gas and electricity bills set to rise by at least £70 million, with hundreds of GP and dental practices potentially unable to absorb the increases.

Taken as a whole, one estimate is that the NHS will need at least £4 billion to compensate for inflation during 2022, even before further possible rises in wholesale energy prices.

No assistance will be forthcoming from the government, which intends to slash public services to fund its war drive and maintain the profits of the major corporations. As the WSWS recently noted of new Prime Minister Liz Truss's plans to massively ramp up military spending by 2030, "Paying for this would mean income tax increases of 5 percent and unprecedented cuts in social spending. £157 billion is equivalent to the annual spending on the National Health Service (NHS) for the whole of the UK."

Instead, the burden will be borne by health workers and those in their care.

University Hospitals Dorset (UHD), which runs Royal Bournemouth Hospital and the Poole General Hospital, has stated that it needs to save £14 million this year. Managers have asked already burnt out, overworked staff to come up with "Cost Improvement Planning (CIP)" ideas, pushing them to further undermine their own terms and working condition and jeopardizing patient safety.

A front-line nurse spoke scathingly about the scheme: "Everything is cut to the bone. There is no room for further cuts without risking patient lives. Over the last 10-12 years, consecutive governments starved the funds going to hospitals. We haven't got enough nurses and other health workers. How can we look after patients safely? Every day we function without a safe level of

staff in the majority of wards. Nearly 1,400 patients died of COVID in our trust alone.

"We have seen a massive erosion of the nutritional value of patient diets. My colleagues often wonder if the food is meant for feeding the birds when they see the portion sizes.

"They suspended parking charges temporarily in 2020 during the pandemic, when we were being cheered by the government as 'heroes'. Then management resumed charging health workers to come to work from June this year. They have already increased the parking charges and plan to increase them again.

"The Bournemouth Private Clinic was established a few years ago. The aim was to try and compensate for funding shortfalls and promote privatisation. It effectively created a two-tier system for patients. Now they are asking us to sacrifice more to satisfy the criminal policies of the Conservative government!"

NHS FightBack, initiated by the Socialist Equality Party, calls for the building of rank-and-file committees of workers to take forward a struggle in defence of their interests and the health service itself. It calls for a massive ramping up of pay, improved conditions and the recruitment of the hundreds of thousands of additional workers necessary to staff a fully funded public health and social care service for all.

*Contact NHS Fightback today.*



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**