

2026, a year of energy, action and transformation: learning from excellence rather than failure

I like to think I am a positive, happy person, and as part of this, I generally have enormous faith and trust in the care our NHS delivers. So, I was devastated last year to see a relative receive truly awful care – but oh, what a difference 6 months and a second opinion make.

In January, we visited the Mike Edmonds Diabetic Foot Clinic at King's College Hospital, London – what a shining example of how patient-centred, multi-disciplinary care could and should be delivered. It was an absolute textbook experience, from the receptionist through to the clinical lead for the unit, we couldn't have asked for more. From warm welcomes and introductions, through to really good explanations and checks of understanding. We were asked questions about why we were there and what we wanted to get from the consultation. We worked together to reach an agreement to work with the local team digitally, so 3-hour trips to London would only have to be every 2 or 3 months – it was all just so very, very good.

It was evident that the team worked incredibly well together and respected each other's particular knowledge and expertise; they were brilliant listeners – and just really nice people! I learned so much in just a few hours and now have a much greater understanding of what my relative needs. We were all so reassured that there were better options for care, and that amputation did not have to be the next step.

So many things about that morning were positive. I could write pages about what they did that was so excellent, but on my train journey home, I reflected on our experience in relation to every other patient's experience elsewhere. We had this appointment through knowing where to go and who to speak to, and not everyone has that. The hospital was clean and easy to navigate with colour-coded wings, clear signage, regular maps and directories in nice big print. It made me think about why these things are important as a visitor. None of us had been to King's before, and we were very anxious about this visit. My relative had lost one leg in August 2025 and the threat of losing

the second was too close to bear. We arrived with well over an hour to spare, just in case, because we couldn't be late for this almost last chance. Being able to get to where we needed to go without confusion and stress was really important.

But isn't this a metaphor for what many of our patients go through? How do they navigate a system that seems like utter chaos? It's not clear who they need to speak to; there is no obvious signposting about who you should see and when you should see them. They are scared about what may happen to them and the impact that will have not just on their life, but also on that of their family and friends. How do we make it easier for them to find the right path, to be reassured, to see coherent evidence-based care being delivered by clinically competent teams that are not constantly being tripped up by red tape or different/differing opinions? What can we learn from this brilliant example of how to deliver care?

Perhaps the most important question in all of this is, should we completely shift our focus? Mainly, we try to learn from what we did wrong, and there is some merit in that. We did this wrong; let's not do it again. However, this doesn't give us a map or direction of how to move on, how to change, or which direction and options would be better. Incident reporting has 'trained' us to focus on negative experiences, to model systems on avoidance of error (even the most unlikely things that may never happen again), thereby putting systems in place that stifle clinical curiosity, creativity, and innovation. Our staff are tied up doing things that, when asked why, answer because 'there is a form to fill in' or a 'box to tick' – nothing about how it improves the patient experience or outcome, or heaven forbid, makes the clinician's life a little easier.

How do we switch this thinking? How do we start to act coherently, working as a team, in the best interest of our patients? We need to have a central focus, a national view, that drives evidence-based care, shares examples of good care deliver, great models of practice



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and supports others to strive upwards rather than looking backwards at failures and mistakes.

In the Chinese calendar, 2026 is the Year of the Horse, and this is the year of energy, action and transformation. It's about pursuing goals

with vigour – that is my plan for this year. There are some really exciting new things coming, aiming to transform how we work together and support each other to deliver consistently excellent care.

I can't wait to share the plans with you! ●



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