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Childhood Cancers:

I sympathise profoundly with anyone who is affected by cancer. Childhood cancer places a deep emotional and physical strain on families, who must be supported throughout the cancer journey.

Alongside improving early diagnosis and treatment, we must ensure that families have access to the mental, physical, and emotional support they need, including qualified mental health professionals in schools to ensure young people get the holistic support they deserve.

As Young Lives vs Cancer highlights, many families struggle with the costs of travel to specialist cancer centres, resulting in delays to treatment. While support is available via the NHS Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS), charities say only a minority of patients receive help and most parents are not aware the HTCS exists. I urge ministers to look at what more can be done to support families and ensure that wealth is never a barrier to treatment.

More widely, I am concerned about the state of cancer services and the pressures on our NHS. Waiting lists have risen to a record high - nearly one in seven people are waiting for treatment – and our health service is underperforming on cancer targets across the board. And the root cause of this crisis is the failure to provide the NHS with the doctors and nurses it needs to treat patients on time.

In my view, we must build an NHS fit for the future - providing it with the staff, technology, resources, and reform it needs - to improve cancer pathways and ensure all patients get the support they need.

This 10-year plan of reform and modernisation will harness technology to fight disease and shift more care out of hospital and into the community, so patients can access more treatment on their doorstep. The plan will prioritise reducing waiting lists, ensure that 75% of all cancers are diagnosed earlier, at stages one or two, and improve survival rates by hitting all NHS cancer targets within five years.

In the meantime, I urge ministers to set out a proper plan to improve care and support to families affected by cancer. Childhood Cancer Awareness month provides a vital opportunity to reflect on the work that needs to be done to improve child cancer outcomes and ensure our NHS is there for patients when they need it most.

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