

'There is no doubt that election fever is rising as the parties announce policies and priorities'

A GENERAL election has not been called yet, but there is no doubt that election fever is rising as the parties announce policies and affirm priorities.

Commentators are increasingly sensing that an election in early May is now likely, and this has given further impetus to the parties to make their policies known.

As ever, developments on health continue to be especially vibrant. The year began with a bang as the Conservatives revealed the health chapter of their draft manifesto. Many of the proposals had been announced in the past, but new policies include the provision of separate public health funding to local authorities, and extra resources being earmarked for the poorest areas with the worst health outcomes through a 'health premium'.

Shortly after the release of their draft health manifesto, the

Conservatives published a green paper on public health. This says: 'Much greater responsibility

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for tackling problems like obesity, drug use and teenage pregnancy will be devolved to communities on a new payment-by-results basis, with extra rewards for improving the public health of the poorest.'

Prevention — and the healthcare needs of the UK's ageing population — are also prioritised in the government's five-year plan *NHS 2010-2015: From Good to Great. Preventative, People-Centred, Productive*, which was published in December. Earlier this month, the prime minister then pledged more choice, control and personalisation in health and social care, and announced plans to expand care in the home and to provide dedicated one-to-one nursing for cancer patients.

The Liberal Democrats have also been vocal this month, as Lib Dem health spokesperson Norman Lamb outlined the 'liberal blueprint for the NHS'. The North

Norfolk MP announced measures such as 'cutting NHS bureaucracy, changing the financial incentives in the NHS to promote prevention of ill health, linking GP pay to [patient behaviour likely to improve health] such as giving up smoking or losing weight, giving every patient the right to contact their GP by email, and fines for people who turn up drunk in [emergency departments] and are aggressive to staff'.

It is clear that the parties are setting out their stalls for what they feel should be the direction of travel for health.

The BMA has published its own manifesto. It argues that any incoming government should ensure that the NHS is sustainable in the long term, there should be a move away from the divisive policy of a market in healthcare, the medical workforce should be supported to deliver high-quality patient care, and there should be a focus on improving and protecting the nation's health.

Read the BMA's manifesto at www.bma.org.uk/lobbying_campaigning/manifesto.jsp
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