

Comments on the governments plans to abolish NHS England

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The Prime Minister has announced the government plans to abolish NHS England and merge its functions into the Department for Health and Social Care.

Gerard Hanratty, Head of Health and Life Sciences at UK and Ireland law firm Browne Jacobson, said: “It’s clear the government wants to create a ‘one team’ approach across state-based healthcare delivery, but we will need to see more detail about how this new structure will regulate local NHS commissioners and providers.

“Coming hot on the heels of an announcement hours earlier that integrated care boards (ICBs) will be asked to halve their workforce, we also need to understand what role ICBs will have in this new system.

“From a broader perspective, the government has clearly-stated missions around bringing down waiting lists and improving patient care during this parliament.

“It’s therefore crucial it doesn’t allow the merger of NHS England and Department for Health and Social Care over the next two years to impact this work by unsettling the system and taking away the focus from the principle objectives of the NHS, because our previous experience shows that large-scale reorganisation can often disrupt progress.

“Leaders in government, NHS England, and local NHS commissioners and providers will need to be clear on how they will still take forward this agenda, while not slowing down longer-term ambitions like the integration of emerging technologies such as AI into the NHS.

“Looking to the future, the goal of government should be to transform from a predominantly curative healthcare system that prioritises treatments of diseases to a preventative model, characterised by early interventions, to address numerous challenges faced by state-based healthcare systems such as the NHS.

“We’ve seen some progress made over the past year, especially around driving greater efficiencies in clinical trials, but there’s lots more we can do to drive this transition.

“In other parts of the world, we’ve seen the adoption of readily-available technologies, such as wearables, e-health services and banking-style apps for booking appointments and ordering prescriptions.

“These benefits could be made available to the NHS today with regulation that gives power to patients, so it’s to be hoped any reorganisation can be an enabler, rather than hindrance, to innovation.”

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