Shaping the future of health and social care: Insights from Professor Derek Feeley

On 17 April, Professor Derek Feeley, former Chief Executive of NHS Scotland, hosted a webinar titled ‘Shaping the future of health and social care’, in the lead-up to our annual conference on 1 May. Feeley’s lecture delved into both the challenges confronting the health and social care system and potential solutions. With an eye towards the future, he instilled a sense of hope amongst attendees. He drew from his extensive experience of policy development, including chairing the Independent Review of Adult Social Care, and offered invaluable insights into enhancing health and social care systems. He shared the importance of seizing opportunities for positive change.

Key themes

Professor Feeley opened the session by highlighting that the future of health care often goes unconsidered. The Independent Review of Adult Social Care took place during the pandemic, with findings published in February 2021. The review highlighted key contributions from people with lived experience who were keen to have their voices acknowledged. These included a desire to be heard, recognition of social care as a human rights issue, a call for simplification of processes, and the importance of being viewed as part of the solution, advocating for co-design and co-production.

The webinar emphasised the urgent need for a new narrative around health and social care, rather than portraying it as a societal burden, Feeley advocated for reframing social care as an investment deserving adequate funding. The discussion highlighted the necessity of shifting focus from simply managing needs to proactive intervention and support. Despite existing policies, the implementation gap remains a significant challenge. This highlights the need to strengthen the foundations of policy delivery to bridge the gap between intention and action, which led to the idea of a National Care Service (NCS).

As Professor Feeley discussed what a National Care Service should look like, several key themes emerged, notably the importance of viewing people as active partners in their care, the moral imperatives of establishing a National Care Service, and the concept of radical kinship. Both Feeley and attendees shared the view that the voices of lived experience, including the voices of unpaid carers, should be amplified above all others, and that people must be considered experts in their own care.

When creating a National Care Service, three areas were deemed crucial by Professor Feeley: equity, addressing disparities in outcomes such as life expectancy in different areas; human rights, recognising and enabling rights to improve outcomes through engagement and non-discrimination; and civility, emphasising the need for respect. Additionally, it is essential for care staff to find joy in their work, combating burnout and poor mental health through appropriate interventions.

Feeley concluded the session by stressing that ‘the answer to our problems is not more of the same’, advocating for radical thinking and redesign within the delivery of a National Care Service. We need to be led differently to make these changes, and he explored the concepts of curious leadership and radical kinship, both of which promote vulnerability within positions of leadership. As Feeley explained, these concepts advocate for a move beyond compassion and kindness, towards a system of solidarity in which no one is left behind. Despite acknowledging challenges, Feeley maintained hope, suggesting that crisis can catalyse positive change and pave the way for a new normal.

Feeley emphasised the urgency of initiating work on a new care service, highlighting its potential to enhance all facets of care provision. His poignant remark, ‘most things can be improved if we have a National Care Service’, encapsulated the transformative impact such a service could have. However, attention must be paid to all recommendations within the Feeley Review to fill in the gaps in implementation and service provision to meet the needs of people using social care now and in the future.

Ultimately, Feeley's parting message was a call to action, emphasising that we must start this crucial work without delay.

‘Our Voice, Our Rights, Our Future’

Our upcoming annual conference, themed ‘Our Voice, Our Rights, Our Future’, heavily echoes the issues raised by Professor Feeley, with a strong emphasis on the need for proactive measures to shape the future of health and social care. As emphasised throughout the webinar by Professor Feeley and Sara Redmond, session chair and ALLIANCE Chief Officer of Development, our conference will confront the challenges that we will inevitably face within the health and social care sector, with the aim of transforming these into positive, actionable solutions. Championing the voices of lived experience, the conference will prioritise addressing health inequality and advocating for person centred care. By acting now, we can pave the way for meaningful future change.

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