

The NHS is regularly in the spotlight but last week I was asked to do interviews regarding the severe pressures on accident & emergency services which background research, prior to broadcast, raised some interesting issues about the machine as a whole.

It is clear that A&E is often the highest profile victim of a squeezed system, one that overall is seeing the carry out 400,000 more operations a year while maintaining low and stable waiting times. This is down to the hard work of dedicated staff who strive to provide top quality care to patients throughout the whole system.

However one of the fundamental problems in A&E is that the NHS is not geared up to prevent people having to go there in the first place. Over 70s account for 35 per cent of emergency admissions - but for dementia patients included in this group, A&E often isn't the right place for them. If the health service was geared towards prevention, we could massively reduce the number of older people being admitted to hospital. And if we can address the problem of caring for frail older people, we will be getting it right for everyone.

As someone who works on older people's issues, and if the position existed would love to be an Older People's Minister, I was pleased to see the Government recently launch a Vulnerable Older People Plan. Effectively this looks at trying to ensure that better care is delivered outside of a hospital setting, bringing primary, secondary and social care together.

The outcome of the Vulnerable Older People Plan is expected in the autumn, with implementation from April 2014. It will require a great deal of careful work, ask difficult questions and make tough decisions but if it leads to more personal, more integrated and more compassionate care for millions of people, it will be an important step forward.