SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Now the NHS is never far from the political frontline and last week was no exception with rows over nurses’ training and waiting times in accident and emergency departments. Before the last election, the Conservatives said the NHS was “safe in their hands”, but Labour claim the coalition’s changes to the health service are a waste of money, diverting resources from patient care. So how would a Labour Government deal with the multiple pressures on the NHS such as a growing elderly population? Well the Shadow Health Secretary Andy Burnham joins me now from our Salford studio. Good morning.

ANDY BURNHAM:
Good morning.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
You have been talking about your (what many people are saying) radical plans to merge social care and hospital care. How would that work?
ANDY BURNHAM:
I think we’ve got to start seeing them as one system because at the moment one person has their needs met through three separate systems: their physical needs through the NHS; social needs through council provided social care; and obviously mental health is separate again. So I’m saying it’s time to bring these things together, whole person care - the physical, mental, the social in one system - and that means merging the NHS with council social care. And by doing that, I think we can get much better value for money than we currently get because at the moment these two systems don’t work well together. We hear that older people get trapped in hospital because there isn’t the support in the community and, to be honest, that just wastes money.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
And just to be clear, these are concrete plans, are they? This is what you would do if you win the next election? These have been endorsed by the shadow cabinet?

ANDY BURNHAM:
Well these are our emerging plans. I’ve put forward the proposal that we should merge the NHS and social care, and the Labour Party is currently debating that. But this is very much my direction of travel. I think it’s time to update our system for the 21st century. The ageing society demands it because it’s asking questions now that the system can’t answer to the public satisfaction. You know people get passed from pillar to post in the battle for support. You know they have to tell the same story to everybody who comes through the door because again councils and the NHS don’t work together well. So I’m saying let’s give people one point of contact …

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
(over) Okay, but this is …

ANDY BURNHAM:
… for all of their care needs. And if a mum or dad goes into hospital, let’s have social care support going with them, and these are the kind of things you can get from a fully integrated system.
SOPHIE RAWORTH:
So these are ideas though? These are not concrete plans? We’re not saying this is what will happen if Labour wins the next election?

ANDY BURNHAM:
These are our ideas that we’re taking to the Labour Party at the moment. They’ve not yet been endorsed by the Labour Party conference - that will happen in due course - but this is a very clear direction of travel.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
I’m just wondering who would actually be in charge though - the NHS? Would you hand it all over to the NHS? Do you take social care out of the power of local authorities?

ANDY BURNHAM:
Well my proposal is to have the NHS leading on all provision - so the physical, mental and the social. At the moment the social is done by councils. I’m saying the NHS should look after the whole person, and I think by doing that we’ll get much better standards of care. To balance that, I’m saying that councils should lead on the commissioning, so they would hold the budget. And if councils were holding the budget, they could make a much better link between health and housing, health and education, health and leisure - all of these wider things that determine our health. Councils are best placed then to set a strategy for good local population health. So that’s the proposal: the NHS leading on provision, balanced by councils holding the budget.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
And where does the money come from for this because, as you know …

ANDY BURNHAM:
Yeah.
... the NHS is struggling as it is. It needs real term increases. Is that what you would give?

ANDY BURNHAM:
No, what I’m saying is we’ve got to get much more for the money that we currently put into the NHS and social care. We spend about a billion pounds on the NHS, around fifteen to twenty on social care. To be honest, the social care system in England is a malnourished, minimum wage system. It really isn’t working and I don’t think it will ever deliver the standards we aspire to for our own parents, for everybody’s parents, from a system that delivers ten minute slots in people’s homes by staff who aren’t properly trained or rewarded. So I’m saying if the NHS was to kind of lift standards in social care, we’d get much better value for money. But because at the moment we’re seeing the collapse of social care, we’re seeing older people trapped in hospital, expensive hospital beds. That isn’t spending the budget well. So this is a real re…

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
(over) But the way …

ANDY BURNHAM:
… this is about getting more for what people currently put into the system. Physical, mental, social support in people’s homes, avoiding unnecessary trips to hospital.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Okay, so that means you avoid an unnecessary trip to hospital, you get fewer elderly people in hospital beds. That therefore implies you need fewer hospitals. Is that what we’re looking at under a Labour Government - hospital closures?

ANDY BURNHAM:
Well you have to be clear and honest about this. It might mean fewer hospital beds. But I’m not talking about closures of A&Es or other essential services. What we have at the moment is too many older people in general medical beds or medical assessment units. They’re held in hospital often because there’s nowhere else for them. We allow people to fail at home, to drift towards hospital, and that really isn’t
good for them and it certainly isn’t good for the taxpayer. And so I’m saying let’s support people in their home, give them all that they need in their home - physical, mental and social support in one package - and that can get much better use of resources. And I think this change …

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**

*(over)* And that also entails an awful lot more money, doesn’t it?

**ANDY BURNHAM:**

… is long overdue. No it doesn’t. It’s about getting more, as I said, for the budget. You know when the NHS was created 65 years, what a wonderful step forward it was, but it didn’t build in that social side of care. And as we’re all getting older, that’s becoming a bigger and bigger problem because we have a system where one person’s needs aren’t properly met in any part of the system. The reason why older people become lost in the acute hospital - disoriented, dehydrated, we hear those stories so often, don’t we? - it’s because there isn’t the support on the ward, the social support to look after very frail people.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**

*(over)* Absolutely, I’m sure a lot of people would agree with you and I’m sure a lot of people would welcome people being able to move out of hospital beds into their own homes. But the bottom line is the NHS is really struggling for money. You know that. Where is that money going to come from? It needs real term increases in money. Is that what you would give it under a Labour Government?

**ANDY BURNHAM:**

Well we’ve always protected the NHS and we would carry on doing that. But I am talking here not about new money. I’m talking about getting better value for the money that we already put in. If you go to any hospital in England today and you ask the chief executive how many people, older people really shouldn’t be here or now can’t be discharged because there isn’t the support in the community, they will tell you that about a third of the beds are trapped in that way. Now that really isn’t financially sustainable going forward. We can’t waste money in that way. We have to provide much better support in the home. At the moment there’s no incentive to invest
in the preventative side of care, which is social care. You know the incentive there on councils is to cut it to keep council tax low. I’m saying we’ve got to turn this system completely on its head.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
So the NHS …

**ANDY BURNHAM:**
*(over)* We’ve got to give the NHS the incentive to support people properly at home, giving them really high quality, whole person support. And that is a big change that the Labour Party is bringing forward. It’s about saying extending the NHS in this, the century of the aging society, and it’s about saying getting much better value for the budget that we all already put in.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
The problem … Actually let’s just talk more about general politics and the accusation we started talking about - the fact that Labour is being accused of not having enough concrete ideas. What would you say to that?

**ANDY BURNHAM:**
Well we’re beginning now to set out our store. We’re about two years from a General Election and it’s right now that we start to come forward. So I’ve just mentioned there merging health and social care, but just look at what Ed Miliband was saying yesterday about a living wage and for me that’s the beginnings of a genuine alternative at policy on work on benefits that is distinctly Labour because the coalition have tried to take forward the benefits debate by you know dividing people between strivers and skivers. I think it’s really crude and unpleasant politics, and what Ed Miliband is saying is we’ve got to do away with that. What the coalition don’t say is the vast majority or many people who receive benefits are in work; it’s just that they don’t get paid a decent wage or that they aren’t given enough hours to work, so we subsidise low pay in this country. A living wage could really help to address that. And I would say to Ed personally go further and ban things like zero hours contracts. Now that is a Labour response to the debate about work and benefits. Labour, the party of work. We’ve really got to …
SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Okay.

ANDY BURNHAM:
… be strong on that ground, and that’s what Ed Miliband is beginning to do.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Andy Burnham, we’ll have to leave it there. Thank you very much for joining me.

ANDY BURNHAM:
Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS