Today's NHS – it's a challenging time

The good news is that as a nation we are living longer – but what impact does our ageing population have on the amount of money we have available to spend on healthcare?

With increasing costs of medicines and treatments, and a national shortage of GPs and other health professionals working in the health sector, the NHS is currently facing one of its biggest challenges.

In Wiltshire we are definitely living longer, but not all of us are living well in our older years. A significant proportion of our annual budget is spent helping older people and people with a combination of lots of conditions, like Diabetes, to live well. In Wiltshire, over 22% of our population is aged over 65 - and 75,000 of us are living with long term health conditions.

Dr Richard Sandford-Hill a GP at Market Lavington Surgery says: "Providing medical care for an increasingly ageing population is difficult. In my own practice a majority of my routine appointments are attended by people aged over 65, and those people often have complex long term needs".

The NHS is used to doing as much as it can with ever-stretched budgets. The shortage of people working in social care means that together with Wiltshire Council, we're doing our very best to make sure we can support people. And it's not all doom and gloom – we're making some great strides forward to make sure we can properly deal with some of the issues we are facing.

Our number one priority is to make sure that older people can get the care and treatment they need either in their own home, or as close to home as possible. Wiltshire has an overall population of over 480,000 and the geography of our county is a challenge. But by working with Wiltshire Council, using a specially-allocated budget called the Better Care Fund, our GPs have established new ways of supporting people to receive care, stay independent and keep well without having to go into hospital. We're making a real difference to the lives of people in the Wiltshire by tackling head-on issues such as social isolation which can have a big impact on someone's health and wellbeing.

We know that we face a tough road ahead, but by working in collaboration with our health colleagues right across Wiltshire we can carve the right path through, and continue to give people really good health care services.