**Point 20 of OY (social care fragility)** perhaps poses the greatest single threat to the NHS. It is the issue which is causing senior policymakers most concern.

On directly-related healthcare issues, preparations have been reasonably robust. As the NHS Confederation’s Brexit expert Layla McCay says, the Department of Health and Social Care “has probably done as much as it can do to make sure there won’t be [drugs] shortages”.

This is simply not the case for **social care**. The post-no-deal Brexit social care system, already reeling after years of local government funding cuts, faces   multiple threats.

First, there is the risk large numbers of the circa 104,000 EU nationals working in the sector will leave their jobs, if not the country altogether. There are concerns care workers could take similarly paid but far less stressful warehouse-type jobs in the run up to Christmas, or they may go home for Christmas then not return.

Second, as Yellowhammer rightly highlights, the sector’s already financially fragile providers could be pushed over the edge if inflation rises and pushes up the costs of staff and supplies.

Third, it also faces the same issues around medicines shortages, which are a major concern for the NHS.

Fourth, Autumn and winter are seasons of flu, falls and fractures.

So, what can the NHS do about it?

NHS England’s Brexit chief Keith Willett has told NHS and social care providers to work together to mitigate the risk, and suggested staff-sharing arrangements would help.

“As a trust if you’re going to lose the nursing bed element of a care home because they can’t retain nurses then it would be in your interest to support them so those beds stay open and your delayed transfers of care are not compromised,” Professor Willett said. This is sound advice but, with the NHS itself struggling with huge staff shortages, it is unlikely trusts will have much spare capacity to share.

There may therefore be a limited amount the service can do in practical terms.

But the NHS does have considerable powers of political persuasion and potentially the ability to impact government policy!