Worksheet:
Did the NHS *transform* medicine in Britain?

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The National Health Service (NHS)

The NHS was launched in **1948** by the government. Its aim was to provide medical care for everyone in Britain, no matter how rich or poor they were. It was paid for by **National Insurance contributions**, taken from wages of everybody in the same way as tax. This meant everyone could get **free treatment at the point of delivery**.

It was the largest government intervention into medical care. The NHS took over existing hospitals and medical services, for example dentists, family doctors, ambulances, health centres, maternity and child welfare. Many hospitals were rebuilt, and doctors and nurses got improved equipment.

The impact of the NHS

The biggest problem with medicine and health before the NHS was that not everyone had access to medical care. Medical care costed money. While the wealthy benefited from **GPs** and hospitals, the majority of people who were poor could not afford medical care. For example, 8 million people had never seen a doctor before the NHS was set up.

The NHS meant all people had access to medical care because it was **free at point of delivery**. For example, everyone could now visit their **GP**, optician, dentist and make an appointment to see a midwife.

Therefore the NHS played an important part in increasing people's health, well-being and life expectancy, particularly reducing the numbers of women dying in or shortly after childbirth.

The rate of transformation

Transformation did not happen straight away. To begin with hospitals, they didn't actually change that much. After World War Two, Britain didn't have much money to spend on medical care. Access had improved but provision had not.

In **1948**:
- There were more hospitals and **GPs** in London and the South-East than in the rest of the country. This meant not everyone had the same level of access to NHS care.
- Many **GPs** were behind the times and needed up-to-date medical training.
- Waiting times increased and appointment times decreased because more people began visiting **GPs** because it was free.

The rate of transformation

By the 1960s, key changes had taken place to resolve the problems surrounding the NHS in 1948:

- Plans were made to make sure that hospitals and **GPs** were evenly spread across the country.
- In 1966 a **GPs charter** was introduced which encouraged **GPs** to keep up with medical developments.
- With more hospitals and **GPs**, appointment times increased. However, waiting times were still a problem the NHS had to contend with.

Government vaccinations

Inspired by the positive impact of the smallpox **vaccination**, the government launched further campaigns in the 20th century. The vaccine campaigns were funded by the government and provided by the NHS to ensure they were widespread. Before this, local governments were responsible for **vaccination**. The following **vaccinations** became compulsory, like smallpox:

- **Diphtheria**, 1942.
- **Polio** & **Whooping Cough**, 1950. In 1950, there were 8,000 cases of polio a year, but the last case was in 1984.

The following **vaccinations** became optional:

- **Tetanus**, 1961.
- **Measles**, 1968. People think that measles is not a dangerous disease. But this is only because the free vaccines under the NHS did a lot to wipe out measles.
- **Rubella**, 1970.

Government legislation and laws

Laws to ensure healthy living conditions passed in modern times, including:

- The **Clean Air Acts of 1956 & 1968** to prevent smog caused by air pollution due to issues in London in 1952. **The Great Smog of London** of 1952 was a severe air-pollution event that affected London. 12,000 people died from the smog. The government continued to pass laws to protect the population from air pollution. For example, limiting car emissions.
- As part of the **Health Act of 2006**, it was made illegal to smoke in all enclosed workplaces to prevent lung disease. In 2007 it was extended to all public places

These are just two examples to show how proactive the government is in modern times in passing legislation and laws to prevent health issues.

Government lifestyle campaigns

The government and the NHS have carried out regular campaigns and initiatives to try to prevent illnesses linked to lifestyle.

Example 1 - Advertising campaigns warn against dangers to health, such as smoking, binge drinking, recreational drug use and unprotected sex.

Example 2 - Advice and encouragement to tackle **obesity** by getting people to eat more healthy and take regular exercise, such as the **Change4Life** campaign.

Glossary

- **Diptheria** A bacterial infection. It causes a thick covering in the back of the throat. It can lead to difficulty breathing, heart failure, paralysis, and even death.

- **GP** Short for General Practitioner. A doctor based in the community who treats patients with minor illnesses and refers those with serious conditions to a hospital.

- **Measles** Measles is caused by a virus that replicates in the nose and throat of an infected child or adult. Then, when someone with measles coughs, sneezes or talks, infected droplets spray into the air, where other people can inhale them.

- **Obesity** The term used to describe a person who's very overweight.

- **Polio** An infectious disease caused by the poliovirus; in about 0.5 percent of cases there is muscle weakness resulting in an inability to move.

Glossary

- **Rubella** An infection caused by the rubella virus. A rash may start around two weeks after exposure and last for three days.

- **Tetanus** A serious disease caused by a bacterial toxin that affects your nervous system, leading to painful muscle contractions, particularly of your jaw and neck muscles.

- **Transformation** A marked and noticeable change.

- **Vaccination** The injection into the body of killed or weakened organisms to give the body resistance against disease.

- **Whooping Cough** Whooping cough is a highly contagious bacterial disease. Initially, symptoms are usually similar to those of the common cold with a runny nose, fever, and mild cough.

Comprehension Questions

1. When, why and how was the NHS started?
2. How did the NHS improve the health of the nation?
3. Can you list three methods of preventing disease that have appeared since 1900?
4. Explain three reasons why government actions made a difference to the health of the nation since 1900. **You may want to use the following sentence starters to help you.**

   *One reason was… (**Hint**: Identify an action taken by the government)*

   *This was when… (**Hint**: Describe what this action entailed)*

   *This made a difference because… (**Hint**: Explain why this made a difference using phrases like "as a result", "consequently", "this meant that")*

5. <u>Challenge Q</u>: Which government action do you think has made the biggest difference to the health of the nation since 1900? *<u>**Hint**</u>: Think about this carefully and reach a logical decision.*