Introduction: What is the NHS?

"The NHS belongs to the people. It provides a comprehensive service, available to all irrespective of gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, or marital or civil partnership status".(NHS Constitution)
 The NHS began in 1948 out of a principle that good healthcare should be available to all, with access based on clinical need, not ability to pay.
That principle, of putting patients first, remains at its core. NHS services are free of charge to patients in England, except where permitted by Parliament. The service's original focus was the
diagnosis and treatment of disease. Now it plays an increasing role in both preventing ill health and improving the physical and mental health of the population. The rights to which patients, families,
carers, the public and staff are entitled, and the pledges that the NHS is committed to achieve, are now set out in the NHS Constitution. Visit http://www.nhs.uk/Constitution to
view the NHS Constitution. It articulates the shared values of the NHS, and the responsibilities towards the NHS that patients, families, carers, the public and staff have as they experience or work in NHS services. A number of different organisations
make up and support the set of common set of principles and values
which are the NHS. Some of these are NHS organisations as set out in law, such as clinical commissioning groups. Others, such as charities providing NHS funded services, play a key role in making the NHS what it is, yet are not NHS organisations themselves.
Collectively, all of these organisations make up the healthcare system.

Providing care

The NHS is made up of a wide range of organisations specialising in different types of services for patients. Together, these services deal with over 1 million patients every 36 hours. Providers of 'primary care' are the first point of contact for physical and mental health and wellbeing concerns, in non-urgent cases. These include general practitioners (GPs), but also dentists, opticians, and pharmacists (for medicines and medical advice). There are over 36,000 GPs in England, working in over 8,300 practices

For urgent cases, patients can visit a provider of urgent care, such as an accident and emergency department. Healthcare information and advice can also be accessed through NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk).
Health care professionals within GP practices aim to resolve problems locally, including through services provided by the practice. If a condition requires more specialised treatment, or further investigation, patients may be referred to another

healthcare provider. These could be based in a hospital, or in the community. Patients are entitled (where possible) to choose between different types of care and providers of their care. They should be supported to
make the choice that is best for them
.Community based care is increasingly the preferred means of providing care
for the majority of longer term and mild to moderate conditions. This enables people to keep their normal routine, staying close to family and friends. Hospital services remain a key part of the NHS, such as for specialised, surgical or emergency care. Organisations that put patients first, by meeting NHS quality and financial standards, are able to provide NHS funded services. Quality is the
overriding priority for the healthcare system.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/194002/9421-2900878-TSO-NHS_Guide_to_Healthcare_WEB.PDF