

All NHS Provider Trust Chief Executives
All CCG Accountable Officers
All CCG Clinical Leaders
Copy to Local Authority Chief Executives

Gateway Reference: 06600

9th March 2017

Dear colleague,

Action to get A&E performance back on track

We are writing to thank you and your staff for your work over what has been a highly pressurised winter, and - following the Chancellor's Budget statement yesterday - to let you know about the action now needed to turnaround A&E performance in 2017. Further detail will be provided in the NHS Delivery Plan being published in three weeks' time.

Throughout this winter, there have been three consistent themes relating to urgent and emergency care: difficulties in discharging inpatients when they are ready to go home; rising demand at A&E departments, with the fragmented nature of out-of-hospital services unable to offer patients adequate alternatives; and complex oversight arrangements between trusts, CCGs and councils.

To avoid a repeat next winter of this past winter, we need to make concrete changes on all three fronts.

Freeing up hospital bed capacity

First, we know that difficulties with discharging emergency inpatients has reduced the effective availability of beds in which to care for both emergency patients presenting in A&E, as well as patients needing planned surgery. It is therefore vital that, together with our partners in local government, we ensure that the extra £1 billion the Chancellor has made available for social care is in part used to free-up in the region of 2000-3000 acute hospital beds. We would ask that you immediately now engage with the senior leadership of your local adult social care departments to discuss how those patients stuck in hospital needing home care or care home places can access those services.

It is also, however, indisputable that there are places which have still not adopted best practice to enable appropriate flow, including better and more timely hand-offs between A&E clinicians and acute physicians, discharge to assess, 'trusted assessor' arrangements, streamlined continuing healthcare processes, and seven day discharge capabilities. You now need to ensure these happen everywhere, and well before October 2017.

Managing A&E demand

Some estimates suggest that between 1.5 and 3 million people who come to A&E each year could have their needs addressed in other parts of the urgent care system. They turn to A&E because they are unclear about the alternatives or are unable to access them.

You therefore now need to:

- Ensure every hospital implements a comprehensive front-door streaming model by October 2017, so that A&E departments are free to care for the most urgent patients. Yesterday's Budget has made available an extra £100 million of capital to be deployed in the next six months to support this. Proposals will need agreement with the Department of Health and we will be letting you know proposed allocations of this within the next six weeks.
- Strengthen support to your Care Homes so as to ensure that they have direct access to clinical advice, including where appropriate on-site assessment. We are making available £30 million to support universal roll-out of this model, including via 111, in order to reduce the risk of care home residents being admitted to hospital.
- Implement the recommendations of the Ambulance Response Programme by October 2017, freeing up capacity for the service to increase their use of Hear & Treat and See & Treat, thereby conveying patients to hospital only when this is clinically necessary.
- Proceed with the standardisation of Walk-In-Centres, Minor Injury Units and Urgent Care Centres, so that the current confusing array of options is replaced with a single type of centre which offers patients a consistent, high quality service.
- Roll out evening and weekend GP appointments, to 50% of the public by March 2018 and 100% by March 2019.
- Increase the number of 111 calls receiving clinical assessment by a third by March 2018, so that only patients who genuinely need to attend A&E, or use the ambulance service, are advised to do this.

Aligned national support and oversight

Given the national importance of improving NHS urgent and emergency care performance, we intend to simplify the focus of the 30% performance element of the Sustainability and Transformation Fund (STF) for 2017/18, so that it will focus on A&E rather than requiring providers to focus on multiple objectives. For individual trusts it will be linked to effective implementation of the actions set out above as well as achieving performance before or in September that is above 90%, sustaining this, and returning to 95% by March 2018.

In order to ensure complete alignment between NHS England and NHS Improvement in supporting and overseeing urgent implementation of the above actions, we have appointed Pauline Philip as the single national leader accountable to us jointly.

Furthermore, from 1st April we are nominating a single, named Regional Director drawn from NHSI and NHSE to support this implementation work and hold accountable both CCGs and trusts through their local STP's A&E Delivery Boards. Each RD will therefore act with the delegated authority of both NHSI and NHSE in respect of urgent and emergency care.

Thank you for your ongoing leadership on this critical part of what the NHS does for the people of this country.

Yours sincerely



Simon Stevens
CEO, NHS England



Jim Mackey
CEO, NHS Improvement