

NHS England and NHS Improvement Board meetings held in common

Paper Title: Operational performance update

Agenda item: 5 (Public session)

Report by: Amanda Pritchard, Chief Operating Officer
Pauline Philip, National Director for Emergency and Elective Care

Paper type: For discussion

Organisation Objective:

NHS Mandate from Government	<input type="checkbox"/>	Statutory item	<input type="checkbox"/>
NHS Long Term Plan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Governance	<input type="checkbox"/>
NHS People Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Action required:

Board members are asked to note the content of this report.

Executive summary:

This paper provides a summary of operational performance based on published data and work to restore services.

Urgent and Emergency Care

1. Hospitals have now cared for over 350,000 COVID patients needing hospital treatment; in January 2021 alone there were more than 34,000 patients on wards on the busiest day. We are now seeing a decline in the number of COVID patients occupying beds; there were 5,000 patients occupying beds due to COVID on 18 March 2021. As well as continuing to manage the ongoing incident, systems are putting plans in place to step back up non-COVID services.
2. Since April 2020, over 15.7 million patients have sought treatment at emergency departments across England. In February 2021, there were 45,646 A&E attendances per day, almost 1.3 million over the month, representing a daily increase of around 8% compared to January 2021. There were almost 422,000 emergency admissions in February 2021, up almost 5% per day from January 2021. Performance against the 4-hour standard stood at 83.9% for February 2021, compared with 82.8% in the same month last year.
3. In the 12 months to the end of January 2021, NHS 111 handled 3.2 million extra calls – an increase of almost a fifth on the same period the year before. , NHS England established a dedicated COVID Response Service and COVID Clinical Assessment Service accessed through NHS 111. Latest NHS111 First



data shows that almost a third of calls referred to an Emergency Department (ED) are now given a time slot for attendance, increasing efficiency for both patients and EDs.

4. For the year to date, response times for ambulances have improved across all 6 standards from the 2019/20 position. To ensure ambulance service resilience at times of enhanced pressure, mutual aid has been enacted across services.

Elective Care

5. The total waiting list for January 2021 stood at 4.59m with 304,044 patients waiting 52 weeks or longer for treatment. Median waits have declined from over 19 weeks in July 2020 to 12 weeks in January 2021. 66.2% of patients were waiting less than 18 weeks at the end of January 2021.
6. Whilst COVID-related demand is currently reducing, systems are urgently stepping back up their elective services where it is safe to do so and developing activity plans for 2021/22 that ensure capacity is maximised, and that optimal levels of activity are delivered.
7. The Independent Sector will continue to supplement NHS capacity in treating more patients through the Independent Sector Increasing Capacity Framework.

Diagnostics

8. In total, 1.61 million of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during January 2021, representing an increase of 996,949 compared to the first wave peak in April 2020. Elective diagnostic services continued to provide patient care throughout the second COVID wave.
9. The £200m programme of equipment replacement announced in September 2019 has resulted in the replacement of 401 items of Imaging equipment. This will replace all MRI, CT, breast mammography and trailers that were aged over 10 years on the 31st March 2019. Any breast screening equipment 10 years or over on the 31st March 2021 has also been funded for replacement.
10. To support effective infection control practices and recovery of NHS diagnostic services, 43 additional CT scanners have been installed across the NHS, all of which were operational by the end of November 2020. In addition, 33 staffed mobile CT scanners have been contracted from the Independent Sector to supplement existing NHS capacity.
11. Systems continue to implement 'Adopt and Adapt' blueprints for endoscopy and CT/MRI. The regionally led and nationally supported programme was established to accelerate recovery following the first wave of COVID and plans are being updated to enable smarter recovery. The team has been focusing on supporting the delivery of a £150m capital programme to build on the extra activity already being delivered, including an additional 21 CT and 4 MRI scanners to come into service by the end of Q1 2021/22. Work is underway to support expanded use of faecal immunochemical testing (FIT) in symptomatic

patients. An increase in alternative clinically appropriate tests is being used to offset demand for traditional endoscopy.

12. Work is progressing to implement recommendations from the October 2020 Richards' Review into diagnostics recovery and renewal, including the creation of Community Diagnostic Hubs to support expansion of diagnostic capacity, and a transformation of the diagnostic care model across England.

Cancer

13. Cancer services remain a priority for the NHS. From the start of the pandemic in March 2020 to the end of January 2021, nearly 1.9 million people were urgently referred, 84% of whom were seen within 2 weeks, and cancer treatments were at 89% of the level seen in this period the year before. By December 2020, urgent cancer referrals and cancer treatment levels were higher than before the pandemic, and the target of 96% of patients starting treatment within 31 days of a decision to treat was met for the first time since April. This recovery of services after the first wave meant that we entered the new-year period of acute COVID-19 pressures in a stronger position.
14. The high level of COVID-19 in early 2021 has created renewed pressure on NHS services and this has inevitably had an impact, but NHS staff worked to ensure that wherever possible, cancer treatment continued safely. Despite high COVID-19 hospitalisation rates, disruption to cancer services was lower than at the peak in April/May 2020. In January 2021, over 170,000 people were referred for checks on the urgent two-week wait pathway, which is more than twice the number of monthly referrals seen in the first peak last year. A total of 22,942 people started a first treatment for cancer in January 2021 (around 83% of the number in the same period the previous year), 94% of whom did so within 31 days of a decision to treat.
15. The joint NHS England/NHS Improvement/PHE "Help Us Help You – Accessing NHS Services" campaign seeks to encourage patients to access the NHS. A new phase on lung cancer was launched in February, encouraging anyone who has a cough for three weeks or more which isn't COVID-19 to speak to their GP. The messages are being shared across numerous channels including TV and radio advertising, social media and regional press and will run until May 2021.
16. Alongside recovery activity, progress continues to be made against Long Term Plan objectives. The first Colon Capsule Endoscopy (CCE) pilot clinics are now operational, with the first patient receiving a pill-cam in February – this approach should allow us to detect or exclude cancer more quickly, as well as reducing the waiting time for colonoscopies. The £325 million capital funding from the 2020 Spending Review in diagnostic machines will also help to speed up diagnostics and improve patient outcomes.
17. A £15 million innovation fund launched on 17th March 2021 – an open call to the system and suppliers in partnership with Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) Healthcare, aiming to swiftly bring new and existing cancer care innovations to the NHS frontline. The goal is to ensure practical translation of

leading research and innovation directly into cancer care, seeking to benefit patients by addressing the challenges of early detection and diagnosis along with the diagnostic efficiency of cancer services. Applications are welcomed for innovative, creative and future-proof ideas across medical devices, digital health and equipment, behaviour intervention and new models of care.

Screening and Immunisations

18. The majority of the screening and immunisation programmes have continued as normal despite pressures from the most recent COVID wave.
19. The NHS Breast Screening programme is offering routine screening invitations for 50-70-year-olds, with the ability for women over 71-years to self-refer again. Work is underway to restore breast screening back to pre-COVID turnaround times, and ensure backlogs continue to reduce and remain manageable.
20. New routine screening invites are being offered in all regions by the NHS Bowel Screening programme, running at a rate of over 100% of pre-COVID levels to catch up invitation intervals by March 2021.
21. The NHS Cervical Screening Programme is continuing to issue invitation and reminder letters at normal intervals (4 and 18 weeks). All laboratories are reporting that the volume of samples received from sample-taking services (primary care and sexual health services) are above pre-COVID levels. As a result of more samples being tested, colposcopy services are seeing increased activity. Activity continues to be closely monitored via the fortnightly Cervical Screening Task and Finish Groups.
22. All services have restarted diabetic eye screening for higher risk patients. A service 'deep dive' is underway to assess local delivery plans and to help inform the requirement for any resource to ensure restoration of the service by March 2022.
23. Immunisations delivery via primary care continue to be delivered as usual. Additional funding has been allocated for routine immunisations, including MMR and Polio. Published coverage data for July to September 2020 showed a fall for all vaccines, with the exception of the "5-in-1" vaccine for 2-year olds, compared to previous reporting periods as some children had their routine immunisations delayed during lockdowns and school closures and local restrictions.

Flu vaccination programme

24. For most groups of people, flu vaccine uptake was the highest it has ever been. At the week ending the 24th January 2021 (the last weekly report for this flu season) 19.1 million people have been vaccinated against flu this winter. This is an estimated 3.7 million (19.4%) more people than had been vaccinated than at this time last year.
25. Vaccine coverage for over 65s was at 80.7%, 9.8% higher than the same time last season, with 1.2 million additional vaccines given. Vaccination of frontline

healthcare workers was at 76.3%, which is 3.9% higher than the same time last season.

26. Flu cases for the season were very low. This is likely to be a result of high levels of vaccination, combined with social distancing measures.

Primary Care

27. The delivery of the vaccination programme and the ongoing second wave of COVID-19 put pressures on general practice and community pharmacy. A set of measures have been put in place, including those set out in our letter of 7 January 2021 to general practice, supporting practices to maximise capacity available to deliver core priorities.
28. Overall GP appointments have increased by around 15% by late January 2021 compared to the equivalent week in 2020, once COVID vaccinations are included, bringing general practice up to a 7m per week run rate, which is 1m per week above pre-pandemic levels.
29. Work continues with regional teams, CCGs, primary care professional bodies and locum agencies to ensure uptake of COVID vaccination amongst primary care healthcare workers, and all primary care patient-facing staff have been offered access to lateral flow testing kits.
30. A letter was sent to GPs on 16th February 2021 informing them of an additional cohort of around 1.9m patients to be added to the Shielded Patient List, with those aged 69 or below added to the JCVI (Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation) Vaccination Cohort 6. The medicines home delivery service commissioned from community pharmacies for Clinically Extremely Vulnerable patients who have been advised to shield has been extended until 31st March 2021, in line with wider shielding guidance.

Mental Health

31. Mental health services have remained open throughout the pandemic. Referrals continue to remain at pre-pandemic levels, with local services working rapidly to respond to the changing context.
32. Delivery against core access, recovery and waiting time standards remains strong in the context of COVID-19, with 417,103 children and young people accessing mental health services, which is above target for 2020/21. Improving Access to Psychological Therapies waiting times are being met at 92.7% for urgent cases and 98.5% for routine cases in December 2020. However, evidence from previous emergency situations, and the increase in referrals following the first lockdown, indicates that COVID-19 will result in increased demand for mental health services in future. It is important that services continue to expand in line with LTP ambitions and ensure referral routes remain open so that those who need treatment can access services.
33. Although some trajectories have been met or even exceeded, the pandemic has inevitably impacted the delivery of some mental health services and this

impact is expected to continue for the remainder of 2020/21 and into future years. The £500 million additional investment in mental health for 2021/22 announced as part of the Spending Review will help the programme respond in this context. Delivery of the LTP remains the focus of our COVID-19 response and the expectation is that local areas should to meet the 2020/21 LTP ambitions to the extent that they are able. It will also be critical to lock-in the beneficial changes made in mental health services over the last year.

34. In October 2020, an extra £15 million was announced to strengthen mental health support for healthcare staff and on 21st February 2021 the NHS confirmed the expansion of services with 40 dedicated support hubs set to open across the country. Additionally, over £400 million was secured for a multi-year programme to replace dormitories in the mental health estate with single, ensuite bedrooms. This programme is now in delivery mode, supporting over 50 individual schemes.

Learning Disabilities and Autism

35. The number of people with a learning disability, autism or both in an inpatient setting has reduced by 28% from 2,895 in March 2015 to 2,059 as at the end of January 2021. Several initiatives are in place to support Long Term Plan commitments, such as 24/7 mental health support lines, a continued emphasis on facilitating family visits, section 17 leave transition and plans to support discharges. There is further work on an urgent admission avoidance project for children and young people and interim policy changes to strengthen Care, Education and Treatment Review processes.
36. Additional funding during winter was provided to support short breaks in the community for children and young people and to reduce the number of people with long lengths of stays with Ministry of Justice restrictions.

COVID Vaccination Programme

37. Since Margaret Keenan became the first person in the world to be vaccinated in early December 2020, the COVID-19 vaccine deployment effort has been progressing at pace. Over 22 million people across England have now received their first dose of the vaccine with all those who fall within the JCVI's first four cohorts having been offered a vaccine.
38. Since 24th December 2020, we have published daily data on the total number of vaccinations and since late February 2021, weekly published statistics have included vaccination numbers at a local authority, constituency and smaller area level.
39. Uptake rates have far exceeded expectations. Recognising that in some communities there are long-standing barriers to engagement, on 13th February 2021 DHSC published the UK COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake Plan, which aims to ensure that all systems are working together to address inequalities in access and uptake. We continue to work to achieve the highest possible uptake in all groups.

40. We are progressively inviting those in JCVI cohorts 5-9 for vaccination, with an ambition to offer a first dose to everyone within these groups by 15th April 2021 before we move into phase 2 (adults age 18-49), to be completed by 31st July 2021.