



Update from the Consortium of Lancashire & Cumbria LMCs

Tuesday 21st December 2021

Support & Development Service

We have merged our GP Support Scheme and Horizon Programme to offer you the Support & Development Service. This service is a free, confidential, and independent peer/ pastoral support service that we provide for all GPs and Practice Staff across Lancashire and Cumbria. This service is provided by GPs and Practice Managers.

As a GP or PM, you spend all your energy supporting others. This can mean that in challenging times or transitions you may be reluctant or too pressured to seek support or a fresh input. Likewise, roles in the admin team are like no other outside the NHS and the daily challenges are not always easy to meet. Therefore, a confidential chat with an empathetic colleague, with no bestowed interest, could make a huge positive difference to keep you in control of potential issues and/ or to keep you enthusiastic about your work. Whether you need support or a challenge to develop further, our service offers the opportunity for you to receive this from our mentors.

For more information of this free confidential peer support offer, please visit our [website](#).

Coping with demand in General Practice - Communications to patients

We have created a [letter](#) that Practices can send to patients/ upload on your website to highlight pressure in General Practice. We hope you will find this useful.

Workload Prioritisation

The RCGP and BMA have created an updated workload prioritisation guide, intended to support practices in their planning as general practice pivots to deliver the accelerated COVID-19 booster campaign. Please see the guidance [here](#).

The guidance will be reviewed on a regular basis as the situation develops.

Fit Note extension period

As from the 17th December 2021, to relieve pressure on GPs for the next few weeks, employees can now self- certify for a 28-day period (previously 7 days) without the employer being able to request medical certificate. It will apply to absences beginning on or after 10th December 2021 up to and including absences beginning on or before 26th January 2022. Whilst it is expected that this will cover the vast majority of situations where fit notes would normally be requested, GPs may continue to receive some for access to occupational sick pay depending on individual contractual arrangements. Similarly, for Practices as employers fit notes may still be requested to access occupational sick pay in line with existing policy or contractual requirements.

The new rules are set out in the [Statutory Pay \(Medical Evidence\) Regulations 2021](#).

For further fit note guidance for GPs, please see [here](#). Please see [here](#) guidance for patients which you may also find useful.





Update from the Consortium of Lancashire & Cumbria LMCs

NHS COVID pass

It is now mandatory for adults (over 18 years old) to demonstrate their COVID-19 status before entering certain venues and events. This means demonstrating that they have received a full course of an approved vaccine, have completed a negative PCR or lateral flow test within the past 48 hours, or are exempt from both testing and vaccination. The NHS COVID Pass can be used to demonstrate COVID-19 status at these venues.

Children aged 12–15-year-old who have had a full course of COVID-19 vaccination are eligible for an NHS COVID Pass letter for travel, which includes an internationally recognised 2D barcode. The letter service can be accessed by calling 119 or via www.NHS.uk.

The medical exemptions service will continue to run, and individuals will still be able to request an application form by calling the NHS COVID Pass Service on 119 and then sending this onto a clinician for review. However, to ensure a national effort to maximise booster rollout, the timeframe for processing a medical exemption request will be at the professional discretion of the practice. DHSC will update all the relevant public guidance to reflect this change.

Impact of COVID-19 omicron variant and vaccination deployment

The UK Covid Alert Level has now been increased to Level 4 due to a rapid increase in cases of the Omicron variant and the Prime Minister has launched an [urgent appeal calling for people to get vaccinated](#).

NHSEI has published guidance to [prepare for the potential impact of the Omicron variant and other winter pressures](#), and the [next steps for the vaccine deployment](#) to ensure the successful ramp up of the COVID-19 vaccine programme.

To support acceleration of the booster programme, [the CQC are postponing](#) all on-site inspection activity for the next three weeks with immediate effect - except in cases where there is evidence of risk to life, or the immediate risk of serious harm to people.

In addition, the BMA have successfully lobbied for a [temporary suspension of the 15 minute wait for the mRNA vaccine](#) which has now been announced to allow for an increased amount of vaccinations to be carried out.

Vaccination as a condition for deployment in the healthcare sector

The Government published the outcome of their consultation on [making vaccination a condition of deployment in the health and wider social care sector](#), advising that from 1 April 2022, only to deploy healthcare workers who have been vaccinated against COVID-19 to roles where they interact with patients and service users, to avoid preventable harm and protect patients in the NHS, protect colleagues in the NHS, and protect the NHS itself. Read the [NHSEI guidance](#)

This is a requirement of the CQC and begins with a collection of proof of vaccination. A sample letter is [attached](#) to adapt/ share with your staff.

Read the full [statement](#) by the chair of BMA Council.





Update from the Consortium of Lancashire & Cumbria LMCs

Exemptions from self-isolation of fully vaccinated staff members identified as a contact of a case

The UK Health Security agency has updated their guidance on [COVID-19: management of staff and exposed patients or residents in health and social care settings](#).

Fully vaccinated GPs and practice staff no longer need to isolate for 10 days if they are a close contact of an Omicron Covid case. The requirement has been replaced with a negative PCR and then daily LFT antigen tests for ten days, with isolation only on testing positive or developing symptoms, for those who are fully vaccinated.

DVLA checks

The Driver and Vehicle Licencing Agency (DVLA) has suspended requests for medical information for the provision of driver's licences until the 12 January (excluding essential workers e.g., bus and lorry drivers).

Firearms licensing guidance

The BMA GPC have [published guidance on the firearms licensing process](#), setting out the BMA position on firearms licensing and providing information to GPs on what to do when someone applies for a firearms licence, including responding to the police and conscientious objection.

The BMA has had significant involvement in the development of [Home Office guidance for chief officers of police on firearms licensing](#) that came into effect on 1 November 2021. The BMA strongly support the Government's overall message, that gun ownership is a privilege and not a right, and that firearms must be in the hands of only those who are deemed safe and responsible.

The LMC are in the process of creating locally tailored guidance together with a flowchart which aims to make guidance clearer.

Firearms licensing requests

The Home Office has written to the main shooting organisations to request where possible, that firearms certificate applicants who are about to submit a request to wait until January before requesting the relevant medical information from their GP or from an independent doctor. The Home Office would be grateful, if a person has a particularly urgent application, for example, because of work commitments or the imminent expiry of their certificate, if practices could still consider providing the information.

Private provider requests for investigations under the NHS

Following queries about requests from private providers relating to investigation and/or treatment of registered patients, the BMA GPC have produced the [attached guidance](#), which includes a template letter to respond to private providers. If a GP is asked by a private provider to arrange investigations or tests, the results of which the GP would not be able to interpret and/or the GP does not feel clinically competent to manage the patient accordingly, then they should advise the patient and the provider that the services do not fall within NHS Primary medical services and to make alternative arrangements.





Update from the Consortium of Lancashire & Cumbria LMCs

Prescription charge for medical exemption certification

The DHSC will temporarily suspend the re-certification requirement for existing prescription charge medical exemptions but retain this requirement for newly diagnosed patients. NHS Business Services Authority (BSA) will contact patients with existing medical exemptions that are due to expire between 16 December and 26 January and supply a new certificate extending their exemption for a further six months. Some people requiring renewals may have already received a reminder and have arranged with their GP surgery for this form to be signed. If this has not yet been done, no action needs to be taken.

Prescription charge waiver for COVID-19 antivirals and therapeutic clinical trials

The Government has [announced](#) that, from 10 December 2021 until 31 March 2022, arrangements have been made under the NHS Regulations for antiviral medicines to be supplied to patients who have tested positive for COVID-19 and who are in the eligible cohorts of patients. Where the patients are not already eligible for free prescriptions, the antiviral medicines will be supplied free of charge.

The waiver will also apply to therapeutic treatments that are being made available through the NIHR funded HEAL-COVID clinical trial platform treating patients who have been hospitalised for COVID-19, for long-term effects and STIMULATE ICP treating community patients for long COVID. NHSEI will be issuing guidance on the use of the waivers.

GMC State of Medical Education and Practice in the UK report

The GMC has published their [State of Medical Education and Practice in the UK 2021](#) report, which shows that GPs are once again reporting much greater pressure than any other group, and that:

- On average, GPs described the workload on 76% of their days as 'high intensity', a significantly higher proportion than specialists (55% of days) and other doctors.
- The proportion of GPs struggling with their workload doubled in 2021, with more than half of GPs (54%) now falling into this group.
- GPs were the most likely to be at a high risk of burnout (32%), compared with specialists and other doctors, and fewer GPs took a leave of absence suggesting that some groups feel less able to take this action.

This data should ring alarm bells for policymakers and Government – not just about how severely over-stretched GPs and their teams are right now, but also on the impact this has on patients and the safety of care they can access. It emphasises what the profession has been saying for several years; that GPs and their teams have been working harder than ever before, and they did all they could to care for patients throughout the pandemic.

Read the [BMA statement in response](#).

