



Tuesday 3rd January 2023

A New Year Note from the Chief Executive

Dear Colleagues,

As we enter a new calendar year it is customary to offer good wishes to everyone and hope for a successful year ahead. However, it is difficult to offer much cheer in the current climate. General Practice has been overwhelmed for several years and, rather than see a light at the end of the tunnel, it just gets worse.

Many practices that have struggled on to meet ever increasing demand by squeezing yet more appointments into the day, now find that is impossible – there is simply no more capacity, and they are “Full.” Practices are having to select who they can see in their available capacity.

We are indeed in unprecedented times and the whole NHS appears to be at the point of imploding. The state of the NHS is increasingly making the headlines on national news and clinicians are openly talking about people dying because of the delays now in the system. There is pressure to declare a national emergency but the Government and NHSE are still publicly in a state of denial.

Our workforce is becoming increasingly demoralised, not just in general practice, but our hospital doctor colleagues, nurses and ambulance staff, as witnessed through industrial action. I don't think any of us can see a way through this in the immediate future as there is no ready solution. It's simply too much demand out there with an ever-diminishing workforce to deal with it.

So, what can practices do in these circumstances and what is the role of the LMC?

- Firstly, you should stay safe and look after yourselves. You will not be able to treat any patients if you go under.
- Secondly you need to find a way that you can prioritise your patients and give the best care that you can, within your available resources, to those that most need it.
- Thirdly you should announce to the system when you are full. Otherwise, the acute sector, with all the focus on bed capacity and A&E waits, will just see their problems and assume general practice is coping.

The LMC is here to support you in whatever decisions you need to take to manage your situation. We are on hand to hear your issues and concerns and offer advice when we can. We are also proposing that practice should work within safe limits and will shortly publish a set of tools to help practices implement what will work for them. We are also vigorously lobbying upwards to the ICB and NHSE on the state of general practice and seeking whatever support and respite that can be given.

We are lobbying for a more robust reporting system to identify when general practice is “full” so that we can alert the ICB when general practice has reached unsafe limits, alongside the very clear measures that the ICB focuses on in terms of A&E waiting times, ambulance dispositions and waiting times. This reporting system needs to be simple and, from listening to practices, needs to be anonymous. I am, therefore, proposing that practices report their status directly to the LMC so that we can aggregate the data and forward it anonymously to the ICB.





- Green – practice has capacity available to deal with referrals
- Amber – practice has limited capacity and may not be able to see everyone when they want to be seen
- Red – practice has no capacity, is not able to accept referrals or has run out of appointments.

I am happy to hear practices views on this. My thoughts are that it should not be a regular report – practices should just report when they have a change in status.

I am sorry that my New Year message isn't very positive. There is little to be positive about. The only crumbs I can offer are:

- A better way of funding and supporting our national negotiators to take on government
- Some recognition of the excellent Select Committee Report on the future of general practice
- The start of negotiations on the GMS contract that will operate from the end of the current 5 year contract deal. There are many views, but the profession is starting to converge on a consensus of what it should contain.
- You are an amazing group of people in practices, who have dealt with everything that has been thrown at you. Your flexibility and resourcefulness have seen you through so far but we need to protect you now to preserve your ability to innovate and adapt to survive.

Best Wishes,

PETER HIGGINS

Chief Executive

