

12 July 2019

Dear Colleagues

Pensions

You will have seen **recent reports** about the effects the current pension arrangements are having on secondary care waiting lists. **Read the BMA statement.** BMA council chair Chand Nagpaul has written to the prime minister saying: 'Current Government policy is driving doctors out of the workforce. The BMA has been working tirelessly to alert HM Treasury and the wider Government to the reality of losing large swathes of expertise from the NHS's most experienced doctors at a time when the over-stretched service needs it most. Without the good will of doctors to cover waiting lists and rota gaps as well as extra sessions in GP surgeries, patients will suffer.' **Read the full letter**

We met with secretary of state for health and social care, Matt Hancock, this week to discuss the changes that must be made to address this situation.

We have also this week written to Conservative leadership candidates Jeremy Hunt and Boris Johnson urging them to make reform of the current pension taxation rules a priority to avoid patient care deteriorating further. The letters point out that doctors having to reduce their hours or retire from the NHS early will only exacerbate poor levels of patient care and reduced staffing levels. [Read the full letters here.](#)

The BMA are also taking legal action against the Government over the 2015 changes to the NHS pension scheme. **Read the BMA press release**

Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable adults: general practice reporting

NHS England has this week sent a letter to CCGs asking for assurance that children and vulnerable adults are effectively safeguarded. STPs and CCGs should be working together with local GP provider representatives and review their local arrangements in 2019/20 and where necessary implement changes, to ensure that safeguarding activity in general practice is supported.

NHSE have asked us to emphasise that not all commissioners will be fully aware of the letter as it has only just gone out but that they will be highlighting the letter more fully to CCGs next week. You can find full details [here](#).

GP pressures (England)

[GP online](#) reported on the latest [NHS Digital](#) GP appointment figures, which showed that of the 307.2m appointments delivered by GP practices across England between June 2018 and May 2019, 211.4m (68.8%) were delivered within a week. In response to this Farah Jameel, GPC England Executive team member, said: "These figures highlight how hard GPs are working across the country to meet demand despite a challenging environment, delivering a high proportion of appointments on the day of booking and the majority within a week. While it's impossible to know for sure, those waiting longer may have booked ahead or

been part of routine bookable availability for chronic disease management, and this is acceptable, appropriate and often necessary.”

GMC Workload survey

A [GMC workload survey](#) showed that more than four in five GP trainers face heavy workloads and that most work beyond their basic working hours every day. This was reported by GP online, where Krishna Kasaraneni, GPC England Executive team member and workforce lead said: 'That GP trainers are facing high workloads and regularly working longer hours than they should be is concerning, but not greatly surprising. Recent BMA research revealed that three-quarters of GPs – and 85% of partners – are working significantly more hours than they're contracted to, which can have a hugely detrimental impact on their wellbeing. General practice continues to be blighted by a workforce crisis, and if we are to encourage more trainees into family medicine while persuading experienced doctors to stay, the working environment for both must be vastly improved. Trainers do a fantastic job of helping develop the next generation of GPs, and that they manage to do this at the same time as providing high quality care to a growing number of patients is a testament to how hard they are working.' Read the story [here](#).

Nine out of 10 patients have 'confidence and trust' in their GP

The results of the annual NHS GP patient survey were published yesterday which shows that nine out of 10 patients have 'confidence and trust' in their family doctor and general practice staff, including nurses and pharmacists. Patients rate their overall experience of their family doctor highly, with four out of five saying their GP treats them with 'care and concern' and provides them with enough time to listen to their needs. Nine out of 10 patients felt involved in decisions about their care, while four in five rated their overall experience of making a GP appointment as 'good'.

It is gratifying to see that despite the immense pressure we are working under (underlined by the results of the GMC workload survey above), our patients continue to appreciate the amazing job we do. You can read out full press release [here](#). Helena McKeown, chair of RB, was interviewed on the BBC News Channel about the results in the survey and details are [here](#). My comments were quoted in the [Mail Online](#), [The Guardian](#), [Pulse](#) and [GP Online](#).

Joint GPC and RCGP IT committee meeting

This week the last Joint GPC and RCGP IT committee meeting of the session was held. Along with the usual wide range of issues which the committee regularly deals with, such as working on the development of the GP IT Operating model, the development of the NHS app, QOF issues, NHS login, LHCREs and GPIT Futures, the committee was also joined by Matthew Gould, the new CEO of NHSX, who outlined for the committee NHSX's mission statement and highlighted the need to simplify IG, providing a simplified and consistent set of guidelines that would enable the system to be compliant with regulations.

The committee was also pleased to note that he has quickly developed a good understanding of the multitude of challenges involved in enabling access to records. He recommitted to the digitisation of Lloyd George records, something agreed as part of the contract changes in England. Crucially, he seemed to understand that infrastructure underpins the ability and future evolution of general practice to enable the use of

technology more strategically. He also informed the committee that he was keen to hear from frontline GPs about their concerns and issues in order to understand the real problems which we are facing.

I should also note that this was last meeting for Paul Cundy and Manpreet Pujara as co-chairs of the committee. I'm sure you join me in thanking them both for their exemplary service in chairing the committee and the invaluable advice and support they have offered us over many years.

Indemnity – paid for travel vaccinations no longer covered by CNSGP

As highlighted last week, the DHSC (Department of Health and Social Care) and NHSR (NHS Resolution) have confirmed a change in cover provided by CNSGP with the supply and administration of paid for travel vaccinations no longer included. Following our representations DHSC and NHS England have committed to ensure that any general practice staff who were administering travel vaccinations and immunisations (where patients were charged a fee) and who understood themselves to be covered under the CNSGP for such activities, are not financially at a disadvantage as a result of any claim, or potential claim, against them as a consequence of relying on the incorrect information.

In order to mitigate any risk to the health of patients, NHSR will provide assistance in relation to any claim for clinical negligence for the supply and administration of privately funded travel vaccinations between 1 April and 31 July 2019. General practice staff should contact NHSR to access support for such claims. Claims relating to the supply and administration of any travel vaccinations or immunisations (where the patient is required to pay) provided outside of this period should be reported to your medical defence organisation or indemnity provider. Read Mark Sanford-Wood's blog about this change [here](#).

ARM webcast

Watch the webcasts from the BMA's ARM [here](#) and you can specifically find my speech and the debate on the GP contract section of the agenda [here](#).

Fit for work ESA65B letter

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has revised the ESA65B letter template, which is sent to GPs once an Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimant has been found fit for work following a Work Capability Assessment (WCA), to inform the GP of the WCA outcome and advise them that fit notes are no longer required for ESA purposes. The ESA65B was revised to further emphasise the clinical discretion of GPs to continue issuing fit notes in appropriate circumstances such as when an appeal against a DWP decision is being undertaken. A sample of the revised ESA65B letter is attached at the end of the short guide on the benefits system for GPs which can be found [here](#).

NHS health information available through Amazon's Alexa

You will have seen the [announcement](#) that the NHS is collaborating with Amazon to provide health information from the NHS website through voice-assisted technology. We responded to this by saying, "[Research has shown](#) that there are more than 50 million GP consultations each year for minor complaints, including blocked noses, dandruff and travel

sickness, costing the NHS billions that could be better spent providing care to those who need it. Therefore, we encourage patients to use a range of resources to practice self-care before visiting their GP, one of these being NHS Choices.

It is a positive step that as more and more people adopt new technologies, Amazon will be directing them to a reliable source that is clinician-led. It is particularly important that we harness the potential that technology can offer in improving access for patients with visual impairments or other disabilities. However, it is vital that there are robust safeguards in place to ensure that the advice given is safe and appropriate, while we would expect any exchange of data to meet strict statutory guidelines. Furthermore, we recognise that accessing information in this way is not suitable for all groups, and if patients have any serious health concerns they should not hesitate to contact their practice or visit an urgent care facility." We will monitor the implementation of this initiative closely.

Medicine Supply Issue Update – July

Please see attached the latest Supply Issue Update for July, from the Department of Health and Social Care. The DHSC are also keen to get feedback on the monthly update, so have set up a brief survey – please access it [here](#) (there is no set deadline as yet, but we will inform you before it closes).

Martin Marshall elected to be the next RCGP chair

Congratulations to Professor Martin Marshall who is the new Chair-elect of the RCGP and will succeed Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard in November 2019 for a three-year term. Martin Marshall is a GP in Newham, East London, and Professor of Healthcare Improvement at UCL. He has been the College's Vice Chair for External Affairs since 2016 and in previous roles has experience of working in government and the charity sector. We have recently worked closely with him on a number of areas, including QOF QI development.

Committee of medical managers elections

We're looking for four medically qualified managers who are engaged in primary care practice, including those working in primary care organisations or within clinical commissioning groups or primary care networks, to join the BMA committee of medical managers. Nominations close at midday on 17 July. All positions have a two-year tenure. Find out more [here](#).

Read the latest GPC [here](#).

Have a good weekend

Richard