

14 May 2021

Dear colleague

## Letter from NHSEI – General Practice Services

As I said to the [UK LMC Conference which was held this week](#), general practice has been through a hard and difficult time that has left many physically exhausted and mentally drained. It's tested every GP team and individual like never before. But it has shown the profession at its best. We have been there for our patients. We have not let them down. We have responded to this unprecedented situation and we have risen to and met the challenge. The hard work and dedication of so many people in general practice has saved countless lives and the nation owes you all a huge debt of gratitude.

So, yesterday's media headlines and the subsequent [letter](#) from NHS England has completely understandably left many GPs and practice teams demoralised, angry and feeling that the immense workload pressures that practices are currently experiencing is not recognised or appreciated. Practices need help and support not condemnation and criticism. I have already expressed to NHSE my very deep concern about the contents of their letter, and I have been candid about how it has been received by the profession.

Instead of knee-jerk responses to press headlines there needs to be proper acknowledgement from the Government and NHSE/I that practices are under huge pressure at the moment, that you are doing the right thing by working in line with national infection protection and control guidance as set out by the CMO and that you have been using telephone and online consultations appropriately to both keep patients and staff safe. This also needs to be much more clearly explained to the public.

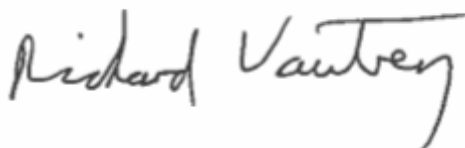
It is for practices to determine how best to manage and deliver their services and the best arrangements for appointments, based on their expert knowledge of their local community. Practices have the contractual freedom to do this taking in to account their capacity and workload pressures, and by doing so delivering a safe service to their patients.

None of us trained to be call-centre GPs and we all want to get back to a time when we have the freedom to see more patients face to face but we need to do that in a way that matches capacity and safety within each practice. As covid-19 prevalence falls and, through the incredible efforts of general practice, vaccination levels rise practices are rightly and wisely adapting the arrangements they have had during the height of the pandemic. However, at present we know there is no spare capacity, there is no surplus workforce waiting to come and

assist and the impact of the wider NHS backlog is having a massive impact on every practice. We know that Practices have been and will continue to offer face to face appointments for those patients who need them as well as trying to protect our patients and colleagues from becoming infected in our surgeries.

We don't just need our patients' understanding, we have often had that throughout this last year, we need governments to act. We don't just need short term fixes, or more letters and guidance telling us what to do, but a return to the freedom to deliver services in the way that best meets the needs of our patients, as well as long-term commitment to investment and development of general practice. That is what we will keep pushing for and what we expect government and NHSEI to deliver.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Vautrey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

**Richard Vautrey**  
Chair, BMA General Practitioners Committee, England