

Parliamentary Briefing: Opposition Day Debate – social cohesion and community, 25 March 2020

NHS Providers is the membership organisation for the NHS hospital, mental health, community and ambulance services that treat patients and service users in the NHS. We help those NHS trusts and foundation trusts to deliver high-quality, patient-focused care by enabling them to learn from each other, acting as their public voice and helping shape the system in which they operate.

NHS Providers has all trusts in voluntary membership, collectively accounting for £84bn of annual expenditure and employing more than one million staff.

Overview

Coronavirus has presented the NHS with its biggest challenge in a generation, putting the system under an unprecedented level of strain at a time when demand for health and care services was already at an all time high. This is by far the biggest challenge the NHS has ever faced and it is striking how people, businesses and communities are pulling together to support their health service and those who work for it.

Staff across every part of a trust are playing their part in responding to this unprecedented challenge. Alongside frontline clinical teams, staff from human resources, estates, IT, communications and other support functions are pulling out the stops and taking on new roles to support the response. Doctors, nurses and allied health professionals from many different specialties have already moved across to care for patients with COVID-19. Alongside this, providers across the acute, community, mental health and ambulance sector are pulling together to help each other during this incredibly difficult period.

We have seen so many great examples of kindness, compassion and generosity from people, businesses and communities who want to support their NHS at this difficult time. Trust leaders and staff are particularly grateful for the thousands of acts of kindness from local communities – from gifts of flowers and food to offers of childcare and accommodation.

Trusts

Trusts across England are adapting how they work in light of the incredible pressures caused by Covid-19.

Examples include:

- Staff at the Countess of Chester Hospital working around the clock to prepare for the coming increase in demand, with their estates team working 18 hour days, seven days a week to redevelop their outpatient clinic and walk-in area into a second A&E department for suspected Covid-19

patients. Offices have been transformed into a ward for patients. The trust now has 100 more available beds and has increased their intensive care capacity fourfold.

- North Middlesex University Hospital moved its entire paediatric A&E department to a new location in just five hours as staff from across all departments worked together, from paediatric emergency medicine consultants to engineers.
- Nurses and staff at County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust worked together to relocate their chemotherapy unit to a community hospital.

Similar efforts can be seen across all trusts as they rapidly relocate entire departments to increase capacity, working at unprecedented speed to free up staff, beds and space for the coming pressures. They are postponing routine operations, speeding up patient discharges, boosting equipment supplies, buying in ventilators, training staff in new skills, scaling up testing and bringing in the private sector to support this huge effort.

Local communities

NHS trusts across England have reported local businesses and communities offering their support, which are incredibly welcome at a time when the health service is under considerable strain. For example, Great Western Hospitals Trust has created welfare packages for staff with food donated by local pubs and hotels. Trust leaders have also reported offers of accommodation for NHS staff whose family members are self-isolating from local hotels while other businesses are offering mobile homes. Some trusts have received donations of flowers from businesses and individuals which have provided a welcome morale booster among NHS staff.

With news that panic-buying has been affecting the ability of NHS workers to buy necessities, we have been pleased to hear how national supermarket chains and local businesses have been actively exploring ways to ensure staff have access to the essential items they need as well as food donations to staff by businesses and individuals.

NHS Providers view

It is clear that we are still at the beginning of the NHS response to the Covid-19 pandemic. We note that, for understandable reasons, much of the public debate has focussed on the problems, failures and gaps that preparing for, and starting to meet this unprecedented challenge, has uncovered.

However, NHS Providers believes it is important that this should be balanced by recognition of how much work is going on at the trust frontline, at NHS national level, and by local communities to prepare for the explosion of demand the NHS will face. We must not lose sight of what has been achieved so far and no one can know at this point whether services will be overwhelmed.