

?Together We are the NHS?

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A pandemic on the scale of COVID-19 was always likely to cause major disruption to health services, and frontline NHS organisations have undoubtedly been tested to their limits. Across all healthcare settings the NHS acted swiftly to bolster its emergency preparedness and resilience, and rose to the challenge with innovation, energy, and kindness. Values of selflessness, care for colleagues, creativity, and kindness have shone through. But the pandemic has exposed its fragilities.

COVID-19 is arguably one of the greatest public health challenges of our time - not least for general practice, where over one million patients are already treated every day. General practice is the foundation of the NHS, but these foundations are creaking. GP consultation numbers are now higher than before the pandemic.

The pandemic has created additional work for GPs - including delivering millions of COVID-19 vaccinations - and there is a major backlog of unmet healthcare needs, compounded by record waits for routine hospital care. General practice has also seen an incredible transformation in the space of just a few weeks, in response to COVID-19 while thousands of GPs responded to the call to return to general practice, and we are very grateful to them. Equally, during this period we recruited record numbers of GP trainees and, as the current recruitment round closes this week, continue to do even better.

We are also transforming GP specialty training to increase the time in practice and enhance training to include greater focus on health inequalities, population health, better mental health care and much more. Alongside this we have a new General Practice Nursing framework and a considerable amount of work supporting the proposed expanded workforce in General Practice including clinical pharmacists, First Contact MSK Physiotherapists and many more.

Reflecting on the pace and scale of change, and whether these innovations are here to stay has made me think about the courage and conviction we need to collectively muster in the face of the challenges ahead this winter.

GPs of course aren't the only ones under immense pressure, but for me, standing together showing unity and a positive mindset has always been the biggest driver of innovation, pace, and common purpose. As well as absolutely being the right thing to do?

We can, and must, do this to support GPs and all our colleagues across the healthcare system by showing eagerness to try new things and the lessening of professional and institutional silos to recruit and retain our NHS people - after all - we are the NHS.

Best Wishes

Navina

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