

**To Chairs of all Trusts and CCG Clinical Chairs
in the North West**

Bill McCarthy
North West Region
5th Floor
3 Piccadilly Place
Manchester
M1 3BN

By email

E: bill.mccarthy@nhs.net

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Dear Colleagues,

The COVID pandemic is now at the highest levels experienced in the UK at any time over the past 12 months. You will have seen the impact this has already had on NHS capacity in London and the South East.

In the North West we are tracking some 2 weeks behind London. But there are important caveats to this:

- Unlike London and the South East the North West experienced a second peak of COVID infection and hospital admissions in October and November. So this third peak in the North West sees the NHS with already high levels of COVID bed occupancy from the Autumn – not below 15% since October. So, our ability to accommodate the new growth is more limited.
- Already, parts of the region, particularly in Cheshire and Lancashire have experienced unprecedented levels of COVID pressures.
- Community prevalence across the whole North West is now growing at the fastest rate in the country – above 100% growth in the general population and in the over 60 age group in the last 7 days across the Region. This will inevitably translate into a further surge in hospital admissions over the next couple of weeks, reducing our ability to manage local pressure through broader mutual aid arrangements.

We need to act with absolute focus and urgency to save lives of COVID patients and those with other urgent conditions. The NHS in the North West has 5 priorities for at least the next 7 weeks:

- Immediately create capacity in our hospitals through the safe discharge of patients. On Friday I held meetings with Chief Executives and Accountable Officers from the NHS and Local Government in the North West. They will now be enacting plans, including rapid roll out of pulse oximetry, to bring about a step change in the effectiveness of discharge activity.
- Maximise the pace of roll out and delivery of the COVID vaccination programme.
- Ensure the rigour and professionalism of infection prevention and control processes across all settings. We must not add fuel to fire through nosocomial infections both adding risk of harm to patients and staff as well as reducing available capacity.

- Participate and comply fully in the system gold mechanisms so that we can demonstrate agility in supporting the most pressured organisations, pace in expanding critical care surge capacity, and equity in protecting care for urgent non COVID work for as long as we can.
- Support our staff through both strong communication cascade and making available every possible source of health and wellbeing and pastoral support.

By focusing on these priorities, we shall save lives that will otherwise be lost.

As Chairs I will be looking for your leadership in supporting your executive teams and staff at a hugely challenging time; enabling them to focus on these important priorities by minimising unrelated activity (for example postponing all Board development or strategy sessions, keeping Board meetings and committees to the minimum needed to give effective assurance on these priorities); cancelling any unnecessary oversight/contract meetings between organisations; and giving your backing to the redeployment of clinical staff to the opening of frontline capacity or to accelerate the vaccination programme wherever possible.

At regional level we have already over the past few weeks redeployed staff to focus on vaccination and supporting the gold processes. In addition, we are now stepping back our improvement Boards; suspending all business as normal work so that we can move more staff to work on the vaccination programme; suspending Continuing Healthcare catch up work for a period to enable redeployment of clinical staff. We shall in addition keep advocating for the region nationally to secure further national support.

Many thanks for everything you have done and for your outstanding leadership over the last 12 months. We are now entering the toughest period faced by the NHS in the last 70 years. I am confident that we shall work our way through it with the North West characteristic of great professionalism and commitment allied to a deep spirit of collaboration that ensures no one gets left behind or isolated. But this will require immediate and unprecedented action and focus. I am grateful for your support in responding accordingly.

Yours sincerely



Bill McCarthy
Executive Regional Director (North West)

cc

North West Chief Executives and Accountable Officers of all Trusts and CCGs
North West ICS Chairs and Chief Executives