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## **LMC RESPONSE TO 'OUR PLAN FOR PATIENTS'**

Another [plan](#) from another Health and Social Care Secretary that lacks insight and understanding. If only fixing the NHS were as simple as Therese Coffey's ABCD plan announced last week.

### **What does the plan say?**

The plan sets out the Government's priorities for the NHS and social care for this winter and next. The priorities will focus on ambulances, backlogs, care, doctors and dentists.

It states:

*We will:*

- *set the expectation that everyone who needs an appointment with their practice within 2 weeks can get one*
- *prioritise so patients with urgent needs are seen on the same day, including opening up time for more than a million extra appointments over winter*
- *make it easier to contact your practice, by making an additional 31,000 phone lines available for GP practices*
- *inform patients by publishing data on how many appointments each GP practice delivers, and the length of waits for appointments, to enable patient choice*
- *require the local NHS (integrated care boards) to hold practices to account, providing support to those practices with the most acute access challenges to improve performance*

### **What does it mean?**

We want to remind and reassure you that Our Plan for Patients is not contractual and outlines a set of 'expectations.' As far as we are concerned, nothing changes although it may be that there may be local discussions about how this would be measured and monitored. If you are safely meeting the 'reasonable needs' of your patients, we will always stand up for you. We are of the view that appointments should be based on need not want, simply promising that every patient can access an appointment within two weeks makes a great headline but is not realistic.

We are also very concerned that opening up phone lines and adding staff requires extra staff to answer calls and to teach and supervise additional staff. All of which risks adding pressure especially with our buildings bulging to try and keep up with demand.

Furthermore, there is encouragement for patients to 'shop around' based on numbers of appointments offered and waiting times for them. Frankly this is not workable or desirable and we would resist any moves to force practices to publish such data which as we know would be a massive strain on time and a pointless exercise. We suspect that our new Secretary of State assumes that it is as easy to track appointment waiting times in general practice as it is in secondary care settings. It also risks adding more pressure to already pressed practices who may feel pressured to add more appointments to keep up with peers. This further risks burnout and unhealthy ways of working purely to meet unrealistic targets imposed.

We have created an alternative ABCD list of priorities below that we implore the Government address as a matter of urgency:

- **Austerity.** Twelve years of NHS underfunding by the current UK Government means colleagues are working in a system that is chronically underfunded.
- **Burnout.** Research by the King's Fund (2021) found that over fifty percent of NHS staff experience high levels of stress, a leading contributor to burnout.
- **Crisis.** We are facing a workforce crisis. In the past seven years, workforce data shows that across the UK, we have already lost the equivalent to 1,850 FTE GPs.
- **Disillusionment.** 'Our plan for patients' lacks insight and fails to address or acknowledge the current workforce shortages across the NHS. More honesty is needed with the public.

The 'Our Plan for Patients' is tone-deaf. We are infuriated that once again, GPs were not consulted with or involved in its creation. The plan will further increase patient expectations about GP access without addressing the root cause of the issue; there are not enough GPs.

We know you are working harder than ever before.

### **What are we doing about it?**

We will create a series of patient comms to use in practice to help with managing appointment requests and patient expectations.

We have contacted and are working with local media to combat the negative anti-GP rhetoric regarding appointment access.

We are working with LMCs nationally and concerns have been escalated to the BMA's General Practitioner's Committee (GPC)

At our Annual General Meeting last Thursday, we expressed our concerns to Dr Kathy McLean, Independent Chair of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care System (ICS) and pleaded for pragmatism and that a supportive, common-sense approach is taken by ICB colleagues.

### **Support available**

We are here for you. Please tell us if you are contacted by ICB colleagues to discuss access to general practice. You can do so by emailing our Liaison Team at [liaison@nottslmc.co.uk](mailto:liaison@nottslmc.co.uk).

**Lucy Cassidy**

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Nottinghamshire Local Medical Committee Ltd

*On behalf of*

**Michael Wright**

Chief Executive

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