

Key comms

Social Partnership Forum (SPF) Wider Group

15 September 2022

The meeting was chaired by the director of workforce for the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Gavin Larnar.

Vaccination programmes and public health campaigns

Dame Jenny Harries, chief executive UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) provided an update on epidemiology of flu, covid and the vaccination programmes. The UK is currently in a good position with the lowest covid rates since mid-last year, down to 1 in a 100 people according to the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics.

The UKHSA looks at patterns of flu in Australia to inform the UK winter flu vaccination campaign. The flu season in Australia started early in April, instead of June/July.

There will be 33 million people eligible for a free flu vaccination and 26 million eligible for a covid vaccination. The latter had been adapted and now covers the original and omicron strains of the virus. Dr Harries encouraged those eligible for the flu and covid vaccinations to come forward. There may be a feeling that covid is over, but this is not the case, she said.

Asymptomatic testing for covid has been paused due to infection rates having gone down significantly. Tests are still available in certain settings and for those who are clinical vulnerable who may need anti-viral drugs. [Link to announcement](#)

Trade unions asked about the mechanisms that would lead to reintroducing public health measures, such as testing, mask wearing and distancing. They also asked about the staff needed to deliver the vaccination programme and for confirmation that the vaccine would remain voluntary.



Dr Harries explained the UKHSA is looking 6-12 months ahead and outlined preparedness for unpredictable waves of covid and flu. There is a recognisable pattern of certain groups in society who are most impacted due to not taking up the vaccination, further pointing out the importance of all eligible people getting vaccinated.

Dr Harries said the vaccine programmes will be rolled out from primary care settings. Danny Mortimer, NHS Employers added that at this stage, NHS leaders did not anticipate the need to divert their staff to support the vaccination programme.

Workforce Plan

Barry Leavers, director for workforce strategy, NHS England spoke about the workforce plan that aims to support the delivery of more staff, working in different ways. This will provide employers with more flexibility around the skill sets available, aid efficiency and provide staff with more opportunities for career development and progression. The plan will also look at improving workplace culture making the NHS a better place to work.

This product will build on the NHS People Plan and the work Health Education England (HEE) has been doing on the long-term strategic framework. The plan will not be fixed and will be reviewed and updated periodically.

Trade unions were keen that the plan covered the registered and non-registered workforce and asked to be involved in a conversation about the implications for the wider non-clinical workforce.

Barry confirmed that the plan will include details on the number of staff required in the medium to long term. This will include the registered and non-registered workforce. These will not be set as targets but there should be discussion and action taken to seek to achieve the desired workforce numbers. Barry confirmed NHSE is engaging with other system leaders on the workforce plan, and it will be aligned to the updated version of the Long-Term Plan.

Winter planning and preparedness

Iain Pickles, director of urgent and emergency care, NHS England spoke about operational planning for winter, which had been prepared three months earlier than usual to help the service prepare for what will be another difficult period given uncertainty around future waves of covid, flu and other respiratory illnesses. It is also the first year of having integrated care boards as statutory bodies, and so a longer



timeframe was given to provide support for them to have more ownership of their plans. Although the plans may not address all the challenges experienced over the summer, separate workstreams are looking at ways to fix the longer-term issues. Iain also talked through the [eight core objectives within the winter plan](#).

Trade unions felt that the tone of communications to staff needed to recognise they are working through an extraordinary situation, with workforce shortages and having to balance that with the need to maintain core standards of care. This is particularly important coming into a winter during the current industrial context.

There was a discussion around registration and standard of care due to staff shortages. Trade unions and employers advised that staff need to be reassured by regulators and the Care Quality Commission, that there won't be negative repercussions.

NHS England and Health Education England

Tom Simons, chief HR & OD officer and acting deputy chief people officer, NHS England said that NHSE, NHS Digital and HEE will come together on 1 April 2023. The new organisation will be known as NHS England. Tom said this was an opportunity to see where best the people functions, currently undertaken in NHSE and HEE, should be carried out. NHSE and HEE colleagues will identify what functions should continue, what functions should stop, and which ones should be carried out elsewhere – for example in integrated care systems. Stakeholders are being involved in the design phase which should conclude in November.

Trade unions felt that it is important for training and education investment to be protected and not undermined by the merger.

SPF Update

Danny Mortimer, chief executive, NHS Employers and Sara Gorton, head of health, union touched on the continued concern about workforce capacity, with positive conversations in the SPF Strategic Group on these issues.

Danny and Sara highlighted that [ICS partnership principles](#) had been agreed by the national SPF. These provide guidance on partnership working with trade unions on system-based changes that affects the workforce.

Rebecca Smith, director of engagement, NHS Employers updated the group about the cancellation of the HPMA excellence in people awards ceremony on the 8 September, as



a mark of respect following the announcement of the death of HM the Queen. The SPF sponsors the HPMA award for partnership working between employers and trade unions and has published [case studies](#) from two of the 2022 award finalists. The rearranged HPMA awards ceremony will take place on 1 December.

