



## To MPs in Cornwall

20 August 2022

Dear colleagues,

### NHS Performance in Cornwall

It is clear that the NHS in Cornwall has come under sustained pressure, and I am writing to set out how we are taking action across the system to ensure that patients receive the care they need, when they need it.

There are a number of factors impacting performance in the region, including high levels of tourism, an elderly population and workforce shortages in health and social care, alongside significant waves of COVID19 admissions which reduce both the bed capacity available for day-to-day emergency care and the productivity of hospitals through the need for infection prevention and control measures.

These factors affect how patients flow through and out of hospital, which can result in longer waits in A&E, and queues of ambulances waiting to handover their patients which can drive longer ambulance response times in the community.

These pressures are reflected in performance statistics, with general and acute bed occupancy at the Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust (RCHT) at 95.2% in July, an increase of 3.9% over the same month last year. We are also seeing much larger numbers of the most serious ambulance incidents in the Southwest, with Category 1 Life Threatening incidents in July 128% higher than the same month before the pandemic, compared to a national increase of +38%. This is due to a mix of factors, including patient acuity, calls being upgraded, and other pressures.

I want to assure you that we recognise these pressures, and that there are plans in place to address them. Providers are receiving tailored support to improve from NHS England, and a wide range of real actions are being put in place over the coming weeks to help make improvements, including:

- The opening of cardiology virtual ward beds by Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (CPFT) and RCHT;
- A service at CPFT to improve patient discharge into care homes from community hospitals;
- Reprioritising CPFT Continuing Health Care staff to support care home discharges;
- The commissioning of a private ambulance service to support patient discharge into virtual wards, freeing up additional beds in hospitals;
- Boosting staff numbers involved in brokering care packages between the NHS and care sectors, alongside additional discharge coordinators at RCHT;
- Involving the voluntary sector in multi-disciplinary team reviews of patient, maximising voluntary sector involvement in care packages;

- Additional beds to cohort ambulance patients at A&E, freeing up ambulances to respond to incoming 999 calls;
- Additional support lines for care homes, helping them to provide enhanced care to patients and reduce unnecessary admissions to hospitals;
- Enhanced clinical validation of lower urgency 999 calls by the South West Ambulance Service, freeing up valuable ambulance resource for higher priority calls;
- An enhanced frailty rapid response service for falls, alongside the addition of frailty assessment spaces at RCHT from October, and a community frailty multi-disciplinary team to provide weekday cover;
- A Community Pharmacy walk in service which began operating in July, alongside an emergency pharmacy supply scheme, reducing demand on 111 and A&E departments; and
- Support to identify affordable accommodation for lower paid key workers, to attract workforce from out of the area.

The NHS has also set out its national priorities for building resilience this winter. This includes increasing NHS bed capacity, including a mix of new physical beds and expanding the use of innovative virtual wards to treat patients safely at home. We are also preparing for variants of COVID-19 and seasonal respiratory challenges through delivering an integrated COVID-19 booster and flu vaccination programme, minimising hospital admissions from both viruses.

I hope that this letter provides assurance that, despite these extraordinary circumstances, plans are in place to restore performance and protect the services that your constituents depend upon. I am giving these issues my closest attention, as is the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, who is meeting with the Chief Executive of the Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust next week. We will continue to work with the NHS to ensure it has what it needs to deliver for patients, both now and into the winter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Maria'.

**MARIA CAULFIELD MP**  
**MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH**