



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

From Will Quince MP  
Minister of State for Health and Secondary Care

39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

PO-1424518

The Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP  
By email to: [john.redwood.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:john.redwood.mp@parliament.uk)

25 November 2022

Dear Sir John,

Thank you for your correspondence of 2 November on behalf of Mr Steve Feltham, Maiden Erlegh Residents' Association (MERA) Secretary, about the NHS.

I understand Mr Feltham's concerns and I would like to thank him for bringing this issue to your attention.

General practice teams worked incredibly hard during the pandemic to support their patients by adapting and changing their ways of working to ensure they delivered routine appointments, and they supported their communities by helping to deliver the largest vaccination programme in NHS history.

The outstanding efforts of general practice teams continues. We know that GP surgeries remain under huge pressure and demand for their services is high. In September, excluding COVID-19 vaccination appointments, there were on average 1.35 million general practice appointments per working day, compared to 1.3 million in September 2021, an increase of 3.6 per cent.

It is vital that we continue to support general practice teams to provide the best possible care to patients. We made £520 million available to improve access and expand general practice capacity during the pandemic. This was in addition to at least £1.5 billion announced in 2020 to create an additional 50 million general practice appointments by 2024 by increasing and diversifying the workforce.

To bolster general practice teams, free up clinical time and reduce the administrative burden on GPs, we will give primary care networks greater freedom to recruit new roles such as GP assistants and digital transformation leads, allowing general practices to employ the right staff with the right skills. This will mean GPs spend their time delivering appointments and tasks only a GP can do. To encourage and incentivise our most experienced clinicians, including GPs, to stay in practice, we will make changes to correct pension rules regarding inflation.

Ambulance trusts have seen an increase in the incidents they respond to in recent years. In August, 843,676 calls were answered and there were 345,604 incidents where a patient was transported to an emergency department. The Government is committed to supporting the NHS to manage these pressures and is dedicated to ensuring people receive the treatment that they need.

Ambulance trusts are continuously monitored by NHS England's National Ambulance Coordination Centre, and there is a range of support in place to help improve performance. NHS England has allocated £150 million of additional funding for ambulance service pressures in 2022/23, supporting improvements to response times through additional call handler recruitment and retention.

We have made significant investments in the ambulance workforce, and the number of NHS ambulance and support staff has increased by almost 40 per cent since April 2010. Health Education England has a target to train 3,000 paramedic graduates every year from 2021 to 2024, further increasing the domestic paramedic workforce to meet future demand. In addition, to increase ambulance capacity, £20 million will be invested in the financial years 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25. This will increase the ambulance fleet, reduce the age profile of the vehicles, increase productivity and reduce emissions, with the fleet including 30 zero-emission ambulances.

With regard to waiting lists, during the peak of the pandemic in the first wave, we focused on caring for COVID-19 patients while prioritising urgent treatments such as surgery for cancer and other life-saving operations. To prevent the NHS from becoming overwhelmed, NHS England issued guidance to postpone all non-urgent elective activity for three months. I recognise that this resulted in a large number of cancelled and postponed appointments and procedures. Since then, including during subsequent COVID-19 waves, the NHS has been working hard to maintain services and to step up elective activity to pre-pandemic levels wherever possible. This involves making full use of available capacity, both in the NHS and in contracted independent hospitals, to ensure that people across England get the care and treatment they need.

While there was a temporary pause in some elective activity as a result of Omicron pressures, the NHS has done its best to maintain services wherever possible, prioritising urgent and cancer care. We also continue to encourage people to come forward if they are concerned about their health, particularly for suspected cancer symptoms. We are committed to ensuring that elective services continue as fully as possible. In recognition of the challenges being faced, we are backing the NHS with the largest catch-up programme in its history.

To support elective recovery, the Government plans to spend more than £8 billion from 2022/23 to 2024/25, in addition to the £2 billion Elective Recovery Fund and £700 million Targeted Investment Fund already made available to systems this year to help drive up and protect elective activity. Taken together, this funding could deliver the equivalent of around nine million more checks, scans and procedures and will mean the NHS in England can aim to deliver around 30 per cent more elective activity by 2024/25 than it did before the pandemic. A significant part of this funding will be invested in staff, both in terms of capacity and skills.

The Government has also committed to a £5.9 billion investment in capital, for new beds, equipment and technology. This includes investment in technology to improve patient experiences of care and help patients manage their conditions. As we recover services, we are also transforming how they are delivered for patients, including through the rollout of dedicated surgical hubs and more convenient and efficient Community Diagnostic Centres.

Earlier this year, the NHS published its *Delivery plan for tackling the COVID-19 backlog of elective care*, which can be accessed at [www.england.nhs.uk](http://www.england.nhs.uk) by searching for its title. The plan sets out a clear vision for how the NHS will recover elective services over the next three years.

*Our plan for patients*, which was announced by the former Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, details the Government's plans to improve access to general practice, reduce waiting times, and improve ambulance waiting times. This plan can be found at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) by searching for its title.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Will Quince', written in a cursive style.

**WILL QUINCE MP  
MINISTER OF STATE**