

Sir Simon Stevens

Chief Executive
NHS England
NHSE Skipton House
80 London Road
London, SE1 6LH

17 September 2020

Dear Sir Simon,

I write to raise serious concerns and insist on an apology for the unacceptable media briefing by NHS England and NHS Improvement regarding the recent letter sent out to all GPs in England regarding face-to-face appointments.

GPs and their teams have gone above and beyond to support patients throughout the pandemic and continue to support them as we face dramatically increased referral times and backlogs across NHS services due to the impact of COVID-19. Practices will always see their patients face to face when it is clinically necessary and appropriate to do so, and as you will know this dedication to patient care has meant the tragic loss of some of our valued colleagues after they contracted COVID-19 following face to face consultations. Therefore, for GPs to see and read reports in the media that appropriate access to General Practice is a widespread problem, and that GPs are responsible for this is yet another major hammer blow to the morale of an already overworked and underappreciated group of dedicated healthcare workers. Implying within the press release, that GPs are not providing patients with the appointments they need and 'reminding' them that they face 'enforcement action' if they do not has presented NHSE/I as antagonistic and completely out of touch with the profession. It also seems to many GPs that NHSE/I has, by using this tactic, intentionally sought to create negative media coverage of primary care services.

Such briefing and subsequent reports has needlessly raised concerns amongst patients when we should be working together to reassure the public that they can and will get the care that they need. The BMA is now hearing large numbers of reports from practices receiving complaints and many staff members being verbally abused by the public based on these unsupported and ill-informed media articles. This is clearly unacceptable, and NHSE/I must correct these inaccurate and damaging stories immediately.

GPs have worked incredibly hard to rapidly embrace new ways of working to enable care to be delivered during recent months that protects both patients and the workforce. To encourage the media to report otherwise is irresponsible and damaging to both healthcare workers and patients alike. It also undermines the commitment made in the NHS People Plan to create an NHS which is a better place to work for its staff and to create an inclusive culture supportive of new ways working. For many GPs these words now ring hollow. I therefore hope that as well as addressing these misconceptions, NHSE/I will also learn from this significant event and seek to create more parity between how it communicates to and about primary care and other parts of the health service. We could not imagine a similar approach and briefing being done for other sectors in the NHS.

As we face probably the most challenging autumn and winter that any of us will have experienced before, we should be doing all we possibly can to support and care for GPs and other frontline workers. Instead of attacking GPs and their teams NHSE/I must not only apologise to the profession and correct damage

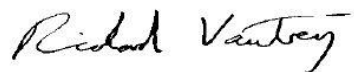
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that has been done but also demonstrate you have taken the necessary action to ensure incidents such as this never happen again.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Vautrey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

Dr Richard Vautrey
Chair, BMA General Practitioners Committee