

The Right Honourable Thérèse Coffey
Secretary of State for Health & Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

27th September 2022

Dear Secretary of State

Your wish to ensure that patients could be seen by their GP within 2 weeks is admirable, though it is deeply worrying that we have reached this point at all: 10 years ago 2 days was considered a reasonable standard. But as the organisation responsible for the welfare of some 500 GPs in Somerset we believe that applying yet more pressure to GPs is not the solution.

The root of our current problem is the severe workforce shortage that affects all parts of the NHS, but most acutely primary care and community services. This has led to a sharp distinction between practices that can recruit clinicians, which tend to be those that are already well staffed, and those who cannot because the existing GPs are struggling with huge workloads. One practice in this county with over 14,000 patients was recently reduced to just one GP partner, and why would any young doctor choose to go and work there?

For practices to provide the best achievable care they need to have a stable, motivated and properly supported workforce so they can deliver the proven benefits, including cost effectiveness, of continuity of care.

Patient needs have steadily increased as the population ages and medicine advances technically, and the effects of the pandemic have dramatically increased the number of sick people - often in need of hospital treatment - who are waiting under the care of their GP practice. Patient wants have also risen as expectation increases that the NHS can solve many of their non-medical problems. The load on practices has steadily increased whilst the number of GPs available to meet it has, at best, remained static.

Although non-medical clinicians are invaluable in supplementing the medical workforce, they cannot replace GPs. Adding more pressure to already fragile practices will simply cause them to collapse. It will not reduce the time patients are waiting to be seen.

Yours sincerely



Dr Karen Sylvester
Chair, Somerset LMC

Somerset Local Medical Committee Crown Medical Centre Venture Way Taunton TA2 8QY

Chairman: Dr Karen Sylvester

Vice Chairman: Dr Tim Horlock

Interim Medical Director: Dr Harry Yoxall & Dr Catherine Ievers
Executive Director: Jill Hellens

Phone: 01823 331428 Fax: 01823 338561

Email: somersetlmc.office@nhs.net

Website: www.somersetlmc.co.uk