

Chairman's Annual Foundation Trust Members' Update – September 2020

I am writing to you as a member of the Trust to tell you about some of the latest developments at the Royal Devon & Exeter NHS Foundation Trust.

COVID-19

When I last wrote to members a year ago we had no idea that we were a few months away from facing the single biggest crisis in generations in responding to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. On 30 January 2020, national NHS leaders declared COVID-19 a serious, level 4 incident underlining the severity of the crisis and the need for NHS providers like the RD&E to respond. Since then, the Trust has dealt with hundreds of cases of COVID-19 and at the same time made significant changes to the way our services are organised and delivered. The scale of the changes we made have been on a scale that is completely unprecedented as we sought to respond to the pandemic.

As I write to you in September, it is clear that the expected surge in cases did not materialise and the region as a whole has not suffered to the extent of other regions. At this stage it is not clear why this was the case, but my own view is that the lockdown, and the adherence to the restrictions, reduced the spread of the virus. Of course, we are now in a situation where there is a very real prospect of a spike in the numbers of cases as we head towards winter which is clearly concerning. It is also, sadly, apparent that, like the rest of England, as a result of the pandemic and other health conditions, 2020 has seen a significant rise in the numbers of unexpected deaths as a result of COVID-19 and other conditions that were not addressed during the height of the pandemic.

In response to the crisis, the Trust took a range of unprecedented actions to prepare and respond. The changes put in place alongside caring for patients with the virus placed considerable strain on many of our staff but, as you would expect, our people rose to the challenge and I am very proud of the way in which we rapidly adapted to the crisis and that our amazing staff continued to deliver high quality care during this period to our patients.

Restoration and Long-Term Recovery Programme

At the height of the pandemic our focus was on the patients that had been infected with the virus and, on direction from our regulators, many of services were significantly reduced to prevent further spread. Over recent months the Trust has been working hard to resume many of our services because of the urgent need to ensure that those people who need hospital treatment receive it. Turning services back on has not been a straightforward exercise because of the need to do what we can to ensure safety. For example, the volume of cases we can see in hospital is far below normal because of the need for social distancing and to enable the use of PPE by our staff. As a result, waiting times for many elective treatments have increased. At the same time, the Trust, like other healthcare providers, has seen real innovation in how health care is delivered. Many of our services have been using phone and video technologies to connect with patients and, based on feedback from those who have used these services, this has been welcome.

Our focus now is on doing what we can to safely restore our services, embedding some of the innovations we have seen, and preparing for a winter period that has the very real prospect of a second wave in cases on top of the usual winter pressures and influenza.

Have your say in shaping health and care services

Restoration and long-term Recovery is also the theme for the Trusts AMM and Members' engagement event. Our priority remains the safety of our staff and Members, which is why this year the event will take place online using videoconferencing. As well as hearing more about our services, the event will also provide opportunities for you to share your views and comment.

For further information about the AMM & engagement event visit our Members' website.

www.rdemembers.com

Governance Lite

In March, NHS England and Improvement contacted all Foundation Trusts to propose changes in order to reduce the burden of reporting and to free up senior capacity to prioritise the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of this direction and taking into account the need to focus on managing COVID-19, the Council of Governors agreed temporary changes to the Constitution at an extraordinary meeting on the 9th April. The RD&E Board subsequently approved the proposed changes to the Constitution to ensure business continuity, maintain good governance, and to pay heed to ongoing government guidance on social distancing and avoiding non-essential travel. The changes approved by the RD&E Board were:

- To remove the need for routine Council of Governor elections in 2020.
- To offer those Governors whose term of office come to an end in September 2020 an extension to September 2021.

These decisions were made in order to maintain the functioning of the Council and to not disadvantage those Governors whose term of office is due to end in September 2020. For further information including details of the Governors who have had their terms extended in line with these changes are available on the Council of Governors page of our members website www.rdemembers.com

Preparing for and dealing with the coronavirus pandemic in Devon while ensuring that we continue to look after both these and other patients with life threatening or time critical conditions in a timely, safe and high quality way is of paramount importance to the people and communities we serve. We also need to ensure that as we manage the pandemic we are as well placed as possible to recover any delays for our patients. In recognition of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, following agreement with NHS England (NHSE) and NHS Improvement (NHSI), I agreed to continue as Chairman of both the Royal Devon & Exeter NHS Foundation Trust (RD&E) and Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust (NDHT) until June 2021. It has been a privilege to chair the RD&E Board and Council for the last eight years and NDHT for the last two years. I was therefore delighted to extend my term as Chairman of both organisations to ensure we remain focused on providing high quality acute and community services to our populations without being distracted at this time. If all goes well, the Council will be in a position to kick start the recruitment campaign for my successor later this year and appoint a new Chair before June 2021.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in April, three Non-Executive Directors were also asked to extend their terms to ensure continuity and stability during the current crisis. The Council of Governors approved the following extensions to existing RD&E Board members:

- Peter Dillon – extension of his term of office until July 2021. Mr Dillon is Vice-Chairman and this is the second extension of a year to his term of office
- Jane Ashman – extension of her term of office until September 2020
- Steve Kirby's – extension of his term of office for three years from August 2020, following completion of his first three year term.

Our performance

The last few months have been completely focused on managing our response to COVID-19 but of course this update aims to cover key headlines across the whole year. I have said for the last few years that the NHS faces an ongoing issue of demand outstripping the resource available and this year was no exception. The Trust continued to face high levels of demand on our services and that has had an impact on our adherence to the nationally set target framework. Delivering access targets is of course important and I understand that having to wait a long time to receive an assessment or treatment is frustrating. I am satisfied that in these circumstances a clinical assessment is undertaken in order to minimise any potential risk. Going forward, it will be interesting to see whether the new ways of working we have embraced could fundamentally change the way that people access care in hospitals and what impact this may have on some of the targets for healthcare that have been in existence for some time.

Our financial position

The national funding settlement for the NHS was welcome but I take the view that, alone, it will not deliver the financial and operational recovery the NHS needs. Devon has one of the most challenged health economies in the country and it is important that we all take responsibility for improving productivity and ensuring there is a fair allocation of national resource for our population in Devon. The Devon Sustainability and Transformation Partnership continues to go from strength to strength in developing a joined up way of addressing some of these key challenges although I recognise that we need to do more to ensure sustainability. Our full annual report for 2019/2020 and previous annual reports are available on our main Trust website on the [Trust Documents page](#)

Our Plans for the Future

In previous updates I have mentioned the importance of transforming our services and the part that technology has to play. We procured a new system from US-based company Epic to support our own transformation programme MY CARE and we made excellent progress during 2019 and early 2020 to get MY CARE ready for training and launch in June 2020. In the context of COVID-19, the Board of Directors decided that it would continue with the programme but in a way that did not impact on frontline care. I am pleased to say that we have now been able to reschedule the going live date for MY CARE to October and I am confident that the use of this technology will make a big difference in providing better care for our patients as well as helping to make our services more efficient.

Collaboration with Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust

Our partnership with the Northern Devon Healthcare Trust (NDHT) has continued to go from strength to strength this year. The Collaborative Agreement between the two organisations began formally in 2018 and involved the RD&E providing leadership and management support to NDHT. The collaboration has already enhanced clinical standards – in maternity, for example – and improved community relations. During the year we announced that the NDHT and RD&E Boards have agreed to explore joining together on a more formal basis. Both Boards agreed that this process must begin with the premise that any new arrangement must be beneficial to people in all the communities served by both Trusts and that it is supported by NHS regulators. The move is the next step in a long-standing partnership between the two organisations.

The RD&E has supported the delivery of acute services in Northern Devon for a number of years through clinical networking arrangements to ensure patients in Northern Devon have local access to specialist care. As part of the Collaborative Agreement, there was a commitment to undertake an appraisal of the best way of structuring the relationship to ensure the continued delivery of clinically and financially sustainable services. The two Boards are absolutely committed to providing the best possible services for our local populations and focusing on securing equal outcomes for our patients.

As we explore joining together more formally, we want to make sure we take the best of both of our approaches and ideas forward. We have continued to work together to determine the next steps and in July both Boards agreed to put in place a revised Collaborative Agreement beyond June 2020 to allow the appropriate processes, including conversations with NHS regulators, to be completed. Further information on the collaboration with Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust is available on our members' website www.rdemembers.com.

The Nightingale Exeter

In July, the Nightingale Hospital Exeter (NHE) held a small event to mark the formal handover of the hospital to the RD&E and to thank some of those who have been a part of the Nightingale's journey so far. Now the build is complete and NHE is ready to receive patients, the RD&E will operate the hospital on behalf of the 5 Trusts in Devon and Cornwall. NHE will remain on standby, and while it remains the case that it isn't currently needed for COVID-19 patients, we will be using the CT scanner and other diagnostics to provide people with safer and faster access to tests for a range of conditions, not just cancer. The hospital beds are specifically designed for people with COVID needs, and throughout this time the facility will remain ready to quickly revert to our primary purpose and receive patients with COVID-19, if the number of cases in the region rises significantly.

Our people

Across the RD&E our teams are working tirelessly to ensure patient and staff safety remains the number one priority throughout the heightened response to COVID-19. Our response to this virus has resulted in a significant shift in how we work together. The transformation opportunities are huge and wide-ranging. Relationships have been built and extended with partners, not only within the NHS but with local government, Universities and the voluntary sectors. Our clinicians and patients have used increased levels of technology and have seen the benefits. Bureaucracy has been challenged and overcome and new models of working have been developed. So the opportunity to improve and use our resources more efficiently is a real one. I hope the respect and fondness of carers and the NHS will be sustained and that this will improve recruitment and retention of wonderful staff.

Our staff have demonstrated a high level of resilience, despite meeting considerable challenges over the last year, according to the latest national NHS Staff Survey. Responses to the wide-ranging survey of our staff remained positive, with 72% of RD&E staff saying they would recommend the Trust as a place to work – well above the 64% average for Combined Acute and Community Trusts nationally. 85% of RD&E staff reported that they would be happy with the standard of care provided by the Trust if a friend or relative needed treatment, compared with an average of 71% in similar trusts across England.

Inclusion is fundamental to the approach the organisation takes to organisational development, culture change, service improvement, and public and patient engagement. Over the last year the Trust has worked hard to put in place a new inclusion strategy, led on behalf of the Board by Suzanne Tracey, Chief Executive. This is an important issue, and, prior to the pandemic, the Trust agreed a programme of work to help make a big leap forward on this agenda. Like other areas, we have had to recalibrate to ensure we helped to manage the diversity and inclusion issues that have arisen during the pandemic but we are hopeful that we can get back on track with our exciting agenda during the coming year.

Thank you!

Finally, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank our staff, our volunteers, the Council of Governors, the community at large, and my Board colleagues, colleagues across the health and care system and our Devon partners for their efforts over the last 12 months. I'd also like to recognise the difference that the charitable giving from our local community makes to patients, thank you to everyone who has donated and fund raised for both our own and partner charities.

RD&E Charity

The RD&E Charity fund raises over and above what the NHS is able to provide to make a real difference to our patients, their families and our amazing staff that treat them. The charity supports fundraising for all areas of the hospital and is currently focused on raising money for the Starfish Appeal. The money raised from this appeal will help us to enhance our children's services and outpatient waiting areas by creating a warm, bright and engaging space. For more information and to see how you could support us visit the Charity page on main Trust website www.rdehospital.nhs.uk

I hope you remain safe and well during these unprecedented times.
With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

James Brent
Chairman

DON'T FORGET: The NHS is back in business – We're open and we're safe!

The RD&E is fully supporting the national campaign and can reassure you that the NHS is still there for you if you are unwell and need help - so, if you get a call for an appointment, please do attend.