

Meeting	Grampian NHS Board
Meeting date:	5 August 2021
Item Number 6	
Title:	COVID Third Wave – System Response
Responsible Executive/Non-Executive:	Professor Nick Fluck, Medical Director
Report Author:	Professor Nick Fluck, Medical Director

Purpose of Report

To update the Grampian NHS Board of the system wide response to the COVID Third Wave

Recommendation

The Board is asked to note the following key points. The Performance Report (item 7 on this agenda) and the Covid Third Wave – Public Health Response (item 5 on this agenda) provide further background and context.

1. COVID Pandemic Context

Between March and May 2020 NHS Grampian managed the first wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic under Operation Rainbow with a full activation of a level 4 Civil Contingencies response. Routine activity was reduced or paused whilst unscheduled demand from other conditions was lower than usual. As we moved towards winter we planned for the usual seasonal surge in demand as well as a second wave of COVID. The combination of winter pressures, a significant second wave and the need to provide a substantial vaccination programme led us to escalate our response back to a Level 4 position in January 2021, under Operation Snowdrop. Operation Snowdrop remained active throughout the first three months of 2021 after which we transitioned back to a level 2 response before commencement of our remobilisation plan.

2. System Pressures

Remobilisation has been very challenging. Whole system capacity has been significantly reduced in a number of ways. Our acute and community hospitals have reduced their bed compliment by over 250 to improve infection control and reduce risk of nosocomial infection. The large increase in workforce achieved at the beginning of the pandemic through early graduation of doctors and nurses or temporary recruitment is no longer available. The processes and procedures required to remain COVID safe has challenged throughput in many areas including outpatient departments and operating theatres. Population health debt, accumulated over the last year is significant.

Major new services have been established (including COVID vaccination programme, test and protect, COVID and Flow Navigation Hubs).
Unscheduled care demand has remained high with reportedly increased acuity. Perhaps most importantly staff pressure and stress is particularly high with depleted resilience following an extraordinary year.

3. The COVID Third Wave

The emergence of a new COVID variant (Delta) with an increased transmission rate has played into this complex picture. It is likely that this will lead to a COVID wave larger than either the first or second. Although vaccination offers very significant protection and has vastly reduced the clinical significance of infection we will still see pressure in the hospital as well as a large impact on the community and our staff availability.

4. NHS Grampian - COVID Third Wave System Response

We remain at level 2 for civil contingency response but in light of the current system pressure and the projected Third Wave we have stepped up our internal system response to co-ordinate our priority actions. This response includes:

- Activation of the Board Control Centre
- Activation of Gold, Silver and Bronze team structure
- New Tactical Plan and Workbook for COVID Third Wave
- New Third Wave – Tactical Operating Model (TW-TOM)
- Contingency decision approach to modification of some standard policies and procedures.
- Enhanced oversight of system staff availability
- Enhanced system oversight reporting and regular check in.

5. Communications

Consideration has been given to ensuring good communication and engagement with staff, the public and other stakeholders and there is a detailed communications plan in place.

Agreed communication actions will continue to be reviewed/delivered via the NHS Grampian Communications Cell (whose membership comprises Corporate Communications, Public Health, Health & Social Care Partnership Communication Leads and Clinical experts) which meets from 09:15 every week day.

Internal communications to staff include films and messages from CET to maintain visible leadership and regular reminders of the importance placed on Staff Health & Wellbeing (We Care) and the practical support available

Social media includes increasing the strength and frequency of messages conveying pressure in the system and need for testing and vaccination and ongoing promotion of [Know Who To Turn To](#) messages and alternative pathways of care (e.g. Pharmacy First).

News media work includes an announcement regarding reduction of permitted visitors into hospital to one and that surgical face masks, rather than personal face coverings, must be worn across Secondary Care. There is a series of planned articles with a Primary Care focus to be used to convey pressure felt across Health and Social Care.

Responsible Executive Director and contact for further information

For any further information in advance of the Board meeting please contact:

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