

Chief Exec's Update



Tuesday 29 September 2026

Hi everyone,

I want to start by recognising it was a really challenging weekend across the Grampian system with extreme pressures on our emergency services, leading to a Board-level critical incident being called. Thank you to everyone who was working, on-call or supported over the weekend. Inevitably there will be learning from this and we will ensure this is captured through the structured de-briefs we will hold and shared more widely with our teams.

Next, I want to recognise we are all in a period of uncertainty, transition and change and this isn't easy.

The Programme for Government has set out proposals for the most transformational changes in many decades for Health and Care in Scotland, which naturally leads to emotions and reactions from us all which needs to be acknowledged.

The Programme for Government presents a significant opportunity to shape a stronger, more sustainable NHS for the future and one that delivers better outcomes for patients across Scotland. I welcome its ambition, particularly its clear focus on improving access to care for patients, reducing waiting times, unwarranted variation across Scotland, and providing more support closer to home. Structural change is however never an end in itself. It must be judged by the practical difference it makes to patients, families, and communities and of course to you as staff. The proposed move to two Strategic Health Boards has the potential to simplify decision-making, reduce duplication, and help services plan more effectively across larger populations. Most importantly, it could allow NHS organisations to use their collective capacity more effectively, so patients can receive high-quality care more quickly and consistently, wherever they live. What is as important, however, is the local arrangements that must be in place in Grampian moving forward to enable place-based care to be effectively delivered for our communities. The devil really will be in the detail here and there is much still to be worked through.

For patients in Grampian, the commitment to rural equity is particularly important. Meaningful engagement with patients, communities, staff, and partnership and staffside will be essential. I will continue to ensure we have a strong voice in discussions about implementation as plans are further developed. However, the direction is encouraging. If we keep patient benefit right at the centre, this reform can help create a more connected, equitable and resilient NHS for Grampian and for Scotland, which is surely the outcome we all want.

We ran our first all staff briefing session last week on Programme for Government, attended by over 200 staff, and will continue these on a regular basis to keep you informed. I am organising drop-in sessions at a range of our sites (ARI, DGH, Woodend and in the community) with Steven Lindsay, our Employee Director, to ensure you have space and opportunities to meet with us and ask us any questions you may have. The dates, times and venues from these sessions which will start in October 2026 will be communicated very soon.

Moving on, Speak Up week started yesterday (28 September) and runs to 2 October 2026. Creating a culture and environment where you feel safe and confident speaking up, knowing your concerns

will not only be received but be acted on, learning happens, and the loop is closed, is where we want to be. However, we have some way to go here. We know, at present, many of you **don't** feel confident a concern you raised would be acted on, learned from, and the results fed back to you. This remains an area of focus for us; if we are to change the culture in Grampian, we must address this. There are many ways you can speak up: raising a concern with your line manager, reporting safety concerns through Datix, contacting our speak up ambassadors or Speak Up Champion, speaking to an accredited staffside rep, or contacting the counter-fraud service if you have specific concerns in this area. This Speak Up Week, we launch the 'Ways we Listen' at NHS Grampian so you know where you can turn to for help and support, no matter that you wish to talk about or the nature of the concerns you want you want to raise. [You can find this via this link.](#)

Finally - violence, aggression and abusive behaviour towards you at work is a serious concern. Reported incidents span verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, and physical assault. These include settings such as our Emergency Departments, our acute hospital wards and in the community. It's understandable patients, families, and visitors may be anxious, distressed or frustrated. Indeed, depending on their clinical condition, some patients may not be in full control of their words or actions. However, I am very clear this cannot excuse abuse or violence. Every one of you has the right to feel safe and respected at work.

We have developed a Standards of Behaviour Protocol for patients and visitors, informed by strong clinical, wider staff (including security team) and partnership engagement. It is intended to support a consistent, lawful, and proportionate response to challenging, violent or aggressive behaviour. The protocol reinforces clear expectations while recognising clinical circumstances, safeguarding responsibilities and individual needs. It also provides guidance on escalation, reporting, documentation and support, and makes clear you should not be expected to remain in situations you reasonably judge to be unsafe.

In addition, a public-facing communications campaign, developed with staff and grounded in the experiences of frontline colleagues is launching. It's already live on digital screens across our hospitals. In the weeks to come, we will be sharing real stories from your colleagues. These will reinforce expectations of respectful behaviour, explain the impact of abuse on patient care and staff wellbeing, and make it clear violence and aggression have consequences. I would like to thank our Emergency Department colleagues for helping us to shape this campaign and make it meaningful. We are also grateful to Police Scotland and the Crown Office for their involvement to date, evidencing the importance of collaboration and partnership working.

Together, I believe the protocol, staff support and public engagement campaign demonstrates a compassionate but unequivocal commitment that aggression is not part of the job. Enough is enough.

Last week I had the privilege of recognising an extraordinary milestone of an extraordinary colleague who marked 60 years of service to NHS Grampian - Helen Smith, Support Services Manager. This achievement represents far more than longevity. It is a lifetime of dedication to patients, service to communities and support for staff. I had the pleasure of joining Helen and her colleagues to mark this special milestone and personally thank Helen on behalf of the NHS Grampian Board. The same day, I hosted our latest virtual Long Service Awards where we recognised 3,690 years of combined service from staff ranging from 25 to 45 years' service. It was an incredible afternoon, filled with joy, laughter, and memories which I enjoyed sharing with long-serving staff.

I would like to thank our Board Chair, Alison Evison, for her dedication and for all she has contributed to our improvement journey over the last 4 years and welcome John Connaghan as our Interim Board Chair from 10 October. I would also like to welcome Rabina Tindale, our new Interim Executive Nurse Director to NHS Grampian. Rabina joins Team Grampian on 6 October. I know John and Rabina look forward to meeting you soon.

Thanks everyone for all your efforts, with a special mention of those who worked over yesterday's Public Holiday to care for our patients.

Best wishes

Laura