

Chief Executive's Report
12 December 2024 Board Meeting
Dr Adam Coldwells, Interim Chief Executive



Purpose of this report

This report updates Board members on priority issues since the last Board meeting which are not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Board Critical Incident

On Thursday 28 November NHS Grampian declared a board critical incident due to the sustained pressure being experienced in our acute hospitals. This formal step in our practiced escalation process enabled us to redeploy staff and draw on mutual aid from partner organisations. I would formally like to thank our colleagues, neighbouring boards, the Scottish Ambulance Service and Health and Social Care Partners for their support during what was a highly complex and challenging situation.

By Saturday 30 November we reached the point where we were able to stand down the critical incident. Life-threatening conditions, such as stroke or heart attack, continued to be prioritised for treatment locally during this time. However, where clinically appropriate, a small number of ambulance patients were diverted away from the Grampian area. A small number of elective procedures were also postponed, which have since been rescheduled for early January 2025. I'd like to take this opportunity to apologise to anyone who was affected by the regrettable but necessary contingency arrangements that were put in place over this period.

Dr Gray's Hospital

You will likely be aware that our system was placed under further pressure by a diarrhoea and vomiting outbreak at Dr Gray's Hospital over the last weekend of November. Whilst unpleasant, these illnesses are rarely serious but the significant number of staff and patients who became unwell posed a serious challenge to flow and capacity in the hospital. This required a coordinated cross-system response in order to allocate and deploy resources, close some wards to new admissions and suspend all but essential visiting until the outbreak could be brought under control.

Those with life-threatening conditions were seen rapidly for treatment but anyone who was symptomatic was asked not to attend planned appointments. At the time of writing, tactical and incident management teams continue to manage our response to the outbreak and public messaging about how to help stop the spread of seasonal infections is being distributed.

System Pressures

Whilst the board critical incident lasted less than 48 hours, our healthcare system remains under sustained pressure and at historically high levels. During the week of the incident, average occupancy at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary was 111%, having not

been under 100% since 8 September. Over the same period Dr Gray's Hospital experienced an average of 124% occupancy, having not been under 100% since 7 September.

This challenging situation is mirrored in community settings across Grampian due to the combination of high numbers of acutely ill patients, delays in discharge, constrained capacity in community healthcare provision and staffing pressures.

In this context, it remains more important than ever that we work collaboratively across health and care to find efficiencies and design new ways of working that lead to improvements and not to unintended consequences. Whilst I have no doubt this will remain challenging when weighed against the need to reduce cost in line with our budget requirements. I am pleased with the progress we have made to align with Integrated Joint Boards, which will help us all to reflect on one another's challenges when decision making.

Baird Family Hospital

Construction of the Baird Family Hospital continues steadily in line with the approved construction programme. The building envelope is now finished, with all internal spaces established and the bridge link connecting the Baird Family Hospital with ARI and RACH complete. An impact assessment of proposed alterations is under consideration by project stakeholders, which we anticipate will be taken forward by the contractor in early 2025.

Anchor Centre

Completion of the ANCHOR Centre remains on pause. In response to a recent feasibility study, a multi-stakeholder risk workshop involving subject matter experts was undertaken to review the impact of occupancy of the new building. This work is ongoing and will conclude early next year following agreement on prioritised alterations to be undertaken ahead of opening.

The physical alterations to the layout and environmental systems within each building are being informed by ongoing national Infection Prevention and Control work. Dates for the completion of both facilities will be presented to the NHS Grampian Board in the New Year, when instructions to the contractor have been agreed. The project team continue to update NHS Scotland Assure on progress, and the Scottish Government have confirmed their continued agreement to underwrite any additional cash flow support to complete both buildings.

The Need for Balance

In the interests of transparency, I often find myself focussing on the operational and fiscal challenges that we face in my formal reports. I also try to share examples of the amazing work which colleagues continue to deliver, despite day-to-day challenges, through our Daily Brief.

At our most recent Area Partnership Forum I was helpfully reminded of both the challenge and importance of achieving the right balance when doing this; with one colleague reflecting that 'good news' stories can give the impression that I don't understand how it feels for staff who are facing enormous pressure within their work environment, whilst another colleague described the importance of promoting the innovation which is ongoing across our system.

With that wise counsel in mind I would like draw attention to three recent examples of our leadership in different areas of the organisation.

In a **world-first**, the pioneering work of Consultant neurosurgeon Anastasios Giamouriadis, is enabling patients to return normal life within days of surgery. His unique approach to removing brain tumours as large as apples through the eyebrow is much less invasive and supports quicker and better recovery. Patients are left with only a small scar and black eye following surgery.

Environmental Sustainability - NHS Grampian will be using Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil to fuel the back-up generators for all new buildings at the Foresterhill Health Campus in Aberdeen. Use of this waste oil in the Baird Family Hospital, the ANCHOR Centre and new mortuary building will reduce our CO2 emissions by around 80% compared to the equivalent diesel and represents an important step towards decarbonisation of our buildings by 2038.

Award-winning - NHS Grampian won the Innovations in Neurology Award at last month's Scottish Healthcare Awards 2024. 'Pharmacy Teams to Improve Migraine Management' was recognised for its work to improve recognition and management for people living with migraine (the lifelong neurological disorder which affects around one in seven people in the UK). In conjunction with The Migraine Trust resources were created for pharmacy teams and public awareness of what support a community pharmacy is able to provide was raised to help improve the lives of sufferers.

Day to day amazing colleagues - As these few examples serve to illustrate, despite the numerous challenges we are facing, I am regularly reminded of the dedication, innovation and compassion of our 17,000 staff. The care and treatment they provide never fails to make me proud to lead NHS Grampian. I would like to thank each and every one of them for their quite amazing efforts.

Dr Adam Coldwells, Interim Chief Executive 12 December, 2024