



To: Directors of Adult Social Services,
Principal Social Workers
Principal Occupational Therapists
and to your teams

22 December 2022

Continued NHS industrial action and its implications for adult social care

We would firstly like to express our sincere thanks to you all. You continue to work so hard to ensure that vital services continue to be delivered to those needing care and support. In any winter, we are grateful for the dedication of our social care services, but the additional challenges from industrial action would have had far greater impact on patients were it not for the dedication and commitment of your staff.

Please pass on our sincere thanks to all your staff, including frontline social workers, occupational therapists, social care staff and managers.

More industrial action is planned, and systems are preparing for the next round on 28 December by GMB Union members. Balloting across other unions also continues, and we expect to see more action taking place in the new year, and so we have taken time today with ADASS Regional Directors to reflect on the experiences felt across the system so far.

We'd like to reflect what we've heard from you so far, so as to ensure that the excellent practice you have told us about is spread as widely as possible, and to ask that you continue to share your experience with us in the coming weeks, so that we can understand pressures and share best practice.

Feedback

System demands have remained high but support, in particular on discharge into care has been steady, with normal winter-related pressures being felt through increased staff sickness within hospitals and other services.

Many of you had an increased focus on discharge, deploying additional staff to expedite the process and prioritising use of care capacity to support this. Throughout the country, ensuring the appropriate assessments on discharge are taking place of course remains essential. Regions noted that increasing Social Care triage staff in hospitals had the effect of keeping demand down through quicker assessments 'at the door' and therefore we would encourage this.

The scale and planning in the lead up to action has meant no increased ambulance delays have been observed, but increased demand on discharge is putting pressure on home care packages, and so communication between the relevant local services remains vital.

Yesterday, we saw decreased ambulance stack in some areas, which may reflect a mindset shift among the community and the general public. We do anticipate however that demand will rise again as people feel a 'normal' service will be resumed, and so pressures may increase again as discharge could be surged in the days following the Christmas break.



Across regions we noted that where advanced planning between local systems occurred, pressures were manageable, but in some cases on industrial action days themselves an increase in operational management calls caused significant pressure on managers, and we would recommend that in planning for further strike days, with NHS colleagues, the proportionality of on the day system management calls and meetings could be reviewed and reduced where good practice has already been seen to be effective.

Moving toward 2023

Sharing best practice and experience will be a key component in our collective learning from this period of industrial action. In the new year we will conduct a “lessons learned” process and share our more detailed findings with you. Local sharing of best practice between systems and ongoing communication across local health and social care partners will of course also remain key in reducing complex pressures across the board.

ICBs and Trusts have been reminded to consider and engage with those delivering services in social care to ensure there are joint plans in place to manage and mitigate the impact of industrial action on social care, and this will continue into the new year. ICBs and Trusts have also been asked to establish appropriate escalation routes for emergency issues and consider how emergency contact plans will be communicated to the social care sector.

As we close out the year, we would once again like to recognise and appreciate the huge effort you have made in response to the pressures you face, especially in winter, and the ongoing challenges of sickness absence that we know you will be feeling. Thank you again, and we wish you and all of your staff and their families a merry Christmas and happy new year.

Yours sincerely,

Michelle Dyson

Director General for Adult Social Care, Department of Health and Social Care

Lyn Romeo CBE

Chief Social Worker for Adults