

Consultation of RCPsychiS Members – Views on Winter Planning

Submission date: Tuesday 18 July 2023

1. Winter Resilience Overview 2022-23

How effective were government actions to support winter resilience across health and care systems last year?

The Scottish Government's Winter Resilience Overview for 2022-23 correctly identified the impact that the cost of living crisis is having on the mental health of people in Scotland. The Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland's own research has found that 52% of people in Scotland are concerned about the impact the cost of living crisis is having on their mental health. As well as this, eight in ten think that demand for mental health services will increase in the future.

With this in mind, it is vital that any winter planning features clear consideration of the needs of mental health services in Scotland.

The College in Scotland welcomed the 2022-23 Winter Resilience Overview's investment into digital mental health service capacity. However, this should not come at the expense of face to face services.

It is vital that people are given a choice of how they engage with services. However, there will be occasions when remote attendance will not be clinically appropriate and face to face engagement will be necessary. For example, if a Mental Health Act assessment needs to be undertaken, if a person requires direct observation or examination in a particular setting, or if complex diagnostic or clinical treatment is necessary.

What additional priorities should inform actions to support winter resilience across our health and care system this year?

The Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland would recommend that mental health is given greater priority in the Scottish Government's planning for the coming winter.

There is a tendency, when the NHS is under pressure, to shift resources towards acute services. This can then have a negative impact on people's ability to access mental health services.

The College in Scotland believes in the principle of parity of esteem, meaning that mental health is viewed in parity with physical health. To move us closer to making this principle a reality, the Scottish Government's plan for the coming winter should outline how waiting times for routine mental health services and access to urgent mental health care will be protected.

2. Capacity and system flow

What were the key factors limiting capacity and delivery in the NHS and social care last winter?

The College in Scotland believes that the key factors limiting capacity and delivery in the NHS and social care last winter were:

- An increase in demand.
- A change in public health seeking behaviour post-COVID.
- Staff numbers, illness and morale.
- And a loss of focus on whole system thinking and understanding.

Was the flow through the NHS and social care adequately maintained last year?

The College in Scotland believes that the flow through the NHS and social care was not adequately maintained last year. This was in part due to a loss of focus on whole system thinking, as well as consideration of the impact of changes in one area across the system. There was a lack of staff and a "shuffling" of staff, as jobs were advertised in different areas. Moving staff from community services into acute services to manage demand reduced

the system's ability to meet people's needs earlier in their care journey. This means that patients then present to services at a later stage with more acute needs.

How can capacity be maximised to meet demand, and maintain integrated health and social care services, throughout the coming autumn and winter?

To maximise capacity, the College in Scotland recommends:

- Adopting a whole system approach, taking into account the needs of all services.
- Promoting staff wellbeing and adequate staffing.
- And managing public expectations centrally, as well as locally.

3. Workforce and staff wellbeing

What factors affected the wellbeing of those providing health and social care support, including both paid and unpaid carers, over the 2022-23 autumn and winter periods?

Several factors affected the wellbeing of Scotland's health and social care workforce over the 2022-23 autumn and winter periods.

Many workers feel undervalued and overwhelmed. This is exacerbated by a perception that staff in some parts of the system are valued more highly than others.

During periods of pressure, many workers are expected to work huge amounts of overtime. As a result of this, and the relentless demand for services, this can lead to unsafe working environments both in the community and in hospitals.

Where services are not able to offer support, additional pressure is then being placed on unpaid carers.

What should be done this year to ensure staff wellbeing, and ensure those providing support (in all settings) are able to continue to do so?

Demand for services is currently too high. To manage this demand, the College in Scotland would recommend:

- Continuing to promote self management, where appropriate.
- Ensuring that people know how to access the correct services, and that these services can meet demand.
- Ensuring that all services are adequately staffed, with a focus on early intervention.
- A focus on staff wellbeing, to reduce burnout over the winter months and a subsequent reduction in the workforce.
- And central government messaging which reflects the picture within health and social care.

4. Outcomes

Were patient outcomes affected last winter, either positively or negatively?

Patient outcomes were affected negatively last winter. However, we do not know the extent of this, as we do not know the true number of people who could not be seen or who had to seek treatment elsewhere.

Where patients are treated is very important and efforts should be made to ensure that they are supported in a setting which is appropriate relative to their needs. For example, whilst there are occasions where this will be necessary, patients seeking support from medical emergency departments do not always need to be referred to specialist services. It is important that a person centred approach is utilised to ensure that patients are directed towards support which best fits their needs. This will minimise distress for both patients and services.

What recommendations would you make to ensure services best support vulnerable communities and achieve positive outcomes this year?

The College in Scotland would recommend that the Scottish Government's planning for the coming winter outlines how they intend to:

- Provide an equity of service for vulnerable communities.

- Adequately staff all services, including mental health services.
- And ensure demand is appropriately managed.

The NHS needs to transform, given the current demographic of our population, the impact on health of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis.

5. Do you have anything else to tell us?