

Area Clinical Forum Report to Grampian NHS Board Meeting on the 12th of January 2022

Purpose of Report

This report updates the Grampian NHS Board on key issues arising from the Area Clinical Forum (ACF) meeting on the 12th of January 2022.

Recommendation

The Board is asked to note the following key points:

ACF Vice chair

Due to appointment into a new role, Catriona Cameron will be stepping down as chair of Allied Health Professions Advisory Committee (AHPAC) and vice chair of ACF. The appointment process for a new vice chair has started and the ACF would like to thank Catriona for her valuable contribution over her time on the forum.

Omicron planning

Adam Coldwells (Deputy Chief Executive) provided a presentation on the Omicron situation and planning for a potential major incident. This was well received with appreciation of the very challenging situation facing the health system and the clear and concise plan was commended. Some concerns raised were around the potential need to cancel staff leave and the impact this would have on staff both physically and mentally. Additional concerns were raised around communication to staff after Omicron and the additional workload anticipated following a further pause in scheduled activity and the resilience of staff in being able to deal with this.

System resilience

A common theme that appears through ACF discussion is around resilience of the healthcare system during this pandemic period and beyond and with particular reference to staff health and wellbeing and workforce challenges. Discussion continues on these topics and ACF are represented on the We Care Steering Group which is proving to be a useful group to share ideas and views from the professional groups. In addition to the discussion at our last meeting noting significant pressure on dental services, the other disciplines share a similar outlook and additional pressures are now emerging around complaints from patients and carers and indeed from colleagues in the healthcare system. A request has been made to provide clarity across the system on anticipated waiting times post Omicron Plan which it is felt will help the wider team manage patient expectations.

Given that the conversation was very similar at this meeting and the ACF chair was not available at the December 2021 Board Meeting to discuss, the summary discussion on Health and Wellbeing, Workforce Challenges, Public Expectation and Cross-system pressures have also been added to this report.

Health and Wellbeing

The professional groups continue to report concerns regarding staff health and wellbeing. Concerns ranging from staffing numbers and challenges to provide sustainable services, to increased working hours and additional stress from home working solutions. The nursing profession note rising patient acuity in mental health and acute services and an increase in violence and aggression towards staff particularly in mental health. Nursing also report challenges supporting newly qualified staff and it is felt that if pressures lead to less support then there is a risk that they will not remain in the profession. Dentistry, GP service and Allied Health Professions (AHPs) noted a reduction in staff morale and some staff movement from roles due to sustained pressure.

Workforce challenges

This was a theme from the meeting felt by all disciplines. Dentistry outlined above, Healthcare science (noted in the last ACF report to the board) having significant challenge due to vulnerable services and sustainability. In addition, the audiology service is significantly challenged at present. The pharmacy profession note considerable workforce issues and inability to recruit to posts. This has resulted, on occasion, in the short term closure of a small number of community pharmacies. They noted that the recruitment into GP practice of pharmacy technicians and pharmacists to fulfil the general medical services (GMS) contract is causing significant recruitment issues in other sectors and some destabilisation of service is occurring. AHP disciplines report challenges with recruitment and particular pressure in podiatry as only critical service is being supplied.

Public education

It has been widely documented that there continues to be significant pressure on all parts for the healthcare system. It was noted from GP, audiology and dental feedback that there is significant challenge from patients which can result in negative interactions causing stressful situations for staff and the public. It is felt that more work needs to be done regarding managing patient expectations and providing clarity on aspects such as waiting times, and available services. It was noted that there is significant social media messaging about GP services but less about other services. The ACF and associated professional groups would be keen to help improve messaging to the public.

Cross-system pressures

Noted by a number of the professional groups are the considerable cross system pressures that exist at the moment mostly due directly or indirectly to the pandemic. Examples include negative feedback directed at colleagues sometimes due to poor understanding of new systems and without appreciation of the pressure that other colleagues in other sectors or services may be under. Inter-professional referrals and pressure around urgency for individual cases are creating additional stress for colleagues. Also noting that reduced staffing for a number of reasons adds to the pressure on those staff who are still working in services. However, this information will not always be known to those outside of a service. It is felt that improved communication and understanding could help to alleviate some of these issues.

Workshop

The workshop mentioned in previous reports focussing on ACF working and how we can improve how we interface with existing structures more effectively was planned for the first part of the meeting. It was unfortunately cancelled for the second time due to system pressures and availability of key individuals. We will be rescheduling this for March 2022.

Board Programme

The Board programme is a standing item on the ACF agenda to allow the forum to fulfil the role of providing clinical and professional advice to the System Leadership Team (SLT) and Board on relevant topics. We look forward to planning our meetings in 2022 aligning with the new Board programme when it is available.

Kim Cruttenden

Area Clinical Forum Chair

January 2022