

Chief Executive's Blog

May 2020

AARON CUMMINS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE

LET'S GO FORWARD, NOT BACK

I am not surprised at the way our teams have stepped up and responded to coronavirus (COVID-19); I've seen them do it throughout my NHS career but what is awe-inspiring is how they do it, day after day, shift after shift. It's been nearly two months now and the public, I believe, have every right to be hugely proud of their NHS, and indeed all 'essential' workers.

I don't want to mislead and say we are nearing the end although we are seeing some much needed respite at times now. Our colleagues and volunteers, whilst remarkable are only human and are in many cases, tired and in need of a break. I can't thank all of you enough for everything you are continuing to do. I know you are all going through an incredibly emotional and testing time, including the recent death of a much valued and loved colleague, Simon. I send my heartfelt and sincere condolences and best wishes to his family, loved ones and friends.



THE BIG 4 AREAS OF FOCUS

Whilst the appointments in my diary might have changed, my thoughts and approach to leading the organisation remain the same and a good deal of my thinking is now focused on a number of areas.

Normally at this time of the year, we would publish the Trust's strategic priorities for the next 12 months. I believe it is important that we keep focus even during the most challenging of times and this year, I have agreed with the Trust Board the following four areas of focus for the Executive team and colleagues across the Trust:

1. Dealing with the current COVID Pandemic as safely and effectively as we can
2. A core focus on staff wellbeing
3. Continued priority on Quality and Safety of our services
4. Post COVID Future - the work of our Recovery Cell

We will share more information on our Big 4 Areas of Focus soon.

NHS PHASE 2

Whilst the future is uncertain, we can be confident that there is one, and I am increasingly thinking about what will our community and hospital services might look like post-COVID? How will it feel and look for our patients and colleagues? When will it be safe to wear less PPE than is needed now? How will we help our patients feel more at ease when visiting our services? When will services start to 'come back online'?



I'd love to hear from you. Get in touch at:
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These aren't just questions that I am thinking about, they are being asked across the whole of the NHS. A Herculean effort has been undertaken to ensure the NHS was able to cope with the expected pandemic surge, and by and large, it has coped incredibly well.

As a result of national planning, there is still some capacity within the NHS to now carefully plan how services are 'stepped back up' in a safe and sustainable manner. We are working closely with regional NHS colleagues as the country starts to plan a post COVID-19 health and care service.

I've attached a [copy of a letter](#) that the NHS chief executive, Sir Simon Stevens has written to all NHS chief executives outlining the second phase of the NHS response to COVID-19. Again, we will share more information about what this might mean for our Trust as soon as we have it.

A NEW ERA AND NEXT STEPS: NO GOING BACK!

Another area I am certain about for the future is how we make change in healthcare. When faced with the challenge of doubling intensive care (ICU) capacity, we increased it sevenfold based on the Imperial College COVID-19 forecasts, as well as creating rehabilitation areas for patients - all on top of continuing to care for emergency patients. You all achieved this at great speed but always keeping in mind the need to mitigate any risks to our patients and colleagues.



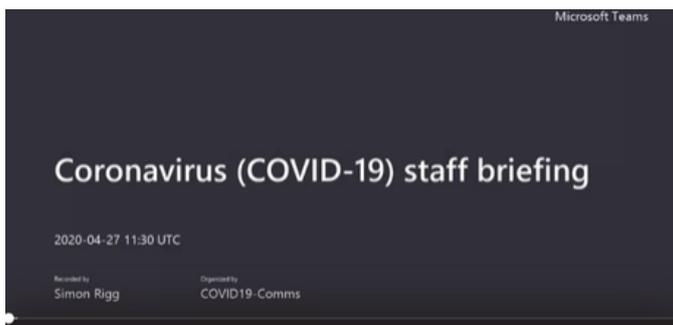
You can read more about the actions we have taken in [our COVID-19 Emergency Plan](#).

We made these changes in response to the immediate challenges in front of us but if we are honest with ourselves, these changes probably needed to be made a long time ago. They haven't been easy to do but it is amazing how a crisis focuses the mind and gives everybody a sense of purpose which is why this year's areas of focus are very specific.

Going forward, we can't return to how we may have enacted service change in the past. That doesn't mean we can 'drive a coach and horses' through legislation nor should we stop including patients and colleagues in decision-making - far from it, we should do more of it but at the same time, move at a faster pace.

Like with any incident, I'm sure there will be future opportunities locally and nationally to look at lessons learned and put them into practice. However, I think we all know we are learning lessons as we go along, so let's not lose them.

I've always appreciated the benefits of technology and this was further driven home recently by a briefing session I held via Microsoft Teams where nearly 250 colleagues joined me online and it didn't descend into chaos! People weren't talking over each other and everyone was very respectful and professional. I'd expect nothing less from you all but thank you nonetheless!



Historically (just weeks ago), a single briefing to that number of colleagues would have meant many travel claims and external venue and refreshment charges - probably in excess of £1,000 - plus the cost of everyone's time being away from the workplace.

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Meeting virtually doesn't replace the need for human contact of course but it is do-able and effective where needed. Can you imagine if in the 'normal' world, we'd have suddenly said the vast majority of all administrative staff should work from home in a week's time? We would have drowned in policy and discussion for months but it was achieved in days up and down the country!

We still have a difficult financial challenge ahead of us; to continually reduce our costs whilst improving our productivity so whilst the above is a small example, it gives me greater hope that we can do it with the right goals and some permissions and imagination. The message from me is 'let's not go back - let's go forward!'

I want to finish by offering a huge thank you from me for everything you are all doing, whatever your role at UHMBT and across Bay Health and Care Partners.

I'm continuing to post regular updates on my Twitter account using #NHSCEODiary, and you can find me @aaroncumminsNHS.

Do take a look if you want to follow what I'm up to. As always, feel free to contact me if you have any questions, queries, comment, ideas or suggestions! I would love to hear from you.

Aaron Cummins
Chief Executive



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