



Preparing for winter

This practical guidance on how best to prepare for winter is intended for clinical and system managers. As well as referring to good practice, much of which the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) has been involved in producing, this guidance responds to what RCP members have told us about morale, working conditions and systems. These are therefore the key things that hospitals should be thinking about in the run-up to winter, although they apply all year round.

Chief executives, medical directors, managers and physicians of all specialties need to work together to make sure that necessary systems are in place. In particular, physicians providing specialty rotas alongside the general take must be able to deliver responsive 7-day services.

Delivery of care

Hospitals should implement good practice, as reflected in current standards and guidance.

- Adoption of the principles outlined in the RCP acute care toolkits¹ will improve patient safety and patient experience, and enhance efficiency.
- The 10-point vision set out in the Society for Acute Medicine quality standards² addresses the challenge of increased pressure.
- The Royal College of Emergency Medicine produces clinical and operational standards,³ a standard for consultant sign-off, a sepsis toolkit and other resources.
- Quality standards for the acute care of older people are set out in the *Silver book*.⁴

Patient flow

Hospitals must put in place an organisation-wide plan for improving the flow of patients through the hospital.

- Hospitals must have put comprehensive front-door clinical streaming⁵ in place by October.
- NHS Improvement's *Focus on improving patient flow*⁶ is mostly concerned with acute hospital care, but should be considered within the context of whole health and social care systems.
- The SAFER patient flow bundle⁷ blends five elements of best practice for cumulative benefits and works well when used in conjunction with the Red2Green approach.⁸
- The senior review element of SAFER refers to *Ward rounds in medicine: principles for best practice*.⁹
- The Nuffield Trust has produced a briefing, *Understanding patient flow in hospitals*.¹⁰

Wellbeing of the workforce

Hospitals must put in place facilities and plans to keep the workforce physically and mentally healthy.

- All staff should be vaccinated against flu,¹¹ to both keep them at work and protect patients from infection.
- Staff should be signposted to initiatives such as the Doctors' Support Network¹² and others listed on the British Medical Association's website.¹³
- As set out in *Work and wellbeing in the NHS: why staff health matters to patient care*,¹⁴ all staff should have 24-hour access to food and drink. There should also be dedicated space for them to rest and reflect.
- Shift patterns should promote rest and breaks must be enforced. Rotas and other planning need to be done as early as possible, so that people can balance their professional and personal lives.
- Diversion from usual responsibilities – particularly for trainee doctors – should not become normalised. It should be for as short a time as possible, with the prior agreement of those responsible for training. It may need to be done at short notice; if so, it should be reviewed regularly.
- Trainee doctors must be encouraged to submit exception reports¹⁵ when their work varies from their agreed schedule.

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Hospital occupancy

Hospitals must work in partnership with other local services to minimise unnecessary hospital occupancy.

- Hospitals should recognise the central role of physicians involved in outpatient or community work, supporting people with long-term conditions to stay out of hospital.
- *Engineering better care*¹⁶ outlines how a systems engineering approach could be applied to health and social care.
- Hospitals could share British Geriatrics Society guidance on effective healthcare for older people living in care homes¹⁷ with local organisations.

We are interested to know about your efforts to ease the pressure, during winter or at any other time. Write to us via winter@rcplondon.ac.uk or connect with us on Twitter [@RCPLondon](https://twitter.com/RCPLondon).

References

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