



3 November 2017

Dear colleague

Re: Preparing for winter

I am writing to share some practical guidance, and to request your help. Telling us about your experience of working in the NHS this winter will help us negotiate with government and others to improve patient care and staff wellbeing.

As winter approaches, the media is full of concerns that the NHS is headed for a crisis. For physicians and the teams that they work with, the reality is a worrying picture all year round. The NHS remains [Underfunded, underdoctored, overstretched](#), and we have to deal with the impact every day.

[Our 2016–17 census](#) found that 55% of consultants frequently or often have a trainee gap in their rota, but three-quarters of them said that they could usually find a workaround solution. When it comes to patient safety, we shouldn't have to work around low staff numbers and inadequate funding. We will continue to talk to government about [our four-point plan](#), making the case for investing in the NHS workforce, health and social care services, and public health.

In the meantime, we know that all health and social care staff will do what they have to do to keep patients safe. The attached guidance focuses on the issues that you have helped us to identify as the most important. We hope that this guidance will help you work with clinical and system managers to make sure that your hospital is prepared for winter.

- Hospitals should improve **delivery of care** by implementing good practice, as reflected in current standards and guidance.
- Hospitals must put in place an organisation-wide plan for improving **patient flow**.
- Hospitals must put facilities and plans in place to protect the physical and mental **wellbeing of the workforce**.
- Hospitals must work in partnership with other local services to minimise **unnecessary occupancy**.

We are interested to know about your efforts to ease the pressure, during winter or at any other time. And we will appreciate you telling us about your experiences over winter, much as you did for [NHS Reality Check: Delivering care under pressure](#), [Against the odds: Experiences from the NHS front line](#) and [Being a junior doctor](#).

In particular, please tell us if you are having any difficulties implementing this or any other good practice guidance. For trainee doctors, that might include support within the hospital for exception reporting.

You can write to us via winter@rcplondon.ac.uk or connect with us on Twitter [@RCPLondon](https://twitter.com/RCPLondon). We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Professor Jane Dacre
President, Royal College of Physicians