



It seems like something we might want to whisper gently after the horrors we have endured over the past 12 months, but I do think there are reasons to be cautiously optimistic this week.

I say cautious because we must be mindful that the situation remains very serious and we must never underestimate this shifting virus, which everyone in the NHS and across our health and social care settings continues to fight each and every day.



We must remember also that well over 100,000 people have died from this cruel virus and, in particular, 700 people at Blackpool Hospitals since our first Covid positive patient arrived at The Vic almost 12 months ago.

We have lived through the most heart-breaking and emotionally difficult period in recent history and it is right that we are making plans for a permanent memorial to ensure all those who lost their lives are remembered alongside the incredible efforts of all staff.

But as community infections and hospital admissions continue to reduce and the number of people we are vaccinating continues to rise, I believe we can allow ourselves to look forward and hope too.

There are currently around 70 people in hospital with Covid across Blackpool Teaching Hospitals. This is the lowest figure recorded by the Trust since October 2020, dropping over the last couple of weeks and continuing to do so day by day. It must be noted though, that this remains above the highest number of inpatients on our wards in spring last year and community transmission rates also remain above where they were in that first wave.

So the numbers of people who need hospital care remains a challenge but they are reducing and this hasn't happened by accident. It is down to everyone following restrictions, staying at home where possible, wearing a face mask when they go out and washing or sanitising hands relentlessly. I know this particular lockdown has been incredibly hard for so many people and I want to thank everyone for sticking to it. You have made a huge difference which I have no doubt is the reason for these reduced pressures across the NHS.

For me, this signals the start of our recovery.

The first thing to do is support our staff. I cannot tell you how proud I am of the magnificent job they have done and continue to do to fight this pandemic on the front line – when they too are struggling with restrictions and lockdown, and Covid amongst their own family and friends.

Let me be clear, each and every member of the organisation has delivered the most monumental effort. Colleagues in work have put their own lives on the line. It has taken significant personal resilience, sheer hard work and, quite simply, inspiring bravery. We can never thank the NHS enough but we can recognise people are exhausted and need a break.

Even before Covid, NHS staff were 50 per cent more likely to experience high levels of work-related stress, feel unwell due to it but come to work anyway. That's who we are and we're proud of it too, but we are going to have to make sure the support is out there for them and the help to come to terms with what they have seen and experienced. It has been huge, in a relatively short space of time, and it will impact people and manifest in conditions such as PTSD, depression and, at its very worst, self-harm or even suicide.

We must do everything we can now to enable staff to rest, recover and be supported and I'm clear that it is my number one priority.

Alongside this, though, there are people living across our communities who desperately need medical attention, treatment and support. We have delayed surgery and services and this needs to be restored.

Balancing these two things is going to be very difficult indeed, but we are committed to doing this and making progress on our waiting lists just as quickly as we can. This week we have been able to carry out cardiac and cardio thoracic work in particular but we are pushing to restore more day to day services as soon as we can. We are asking ourselves each day what more we can do, what wards can be returned to their original pre-Covid purpose and where can staff be enabled to go back to their 'normal' roles.

This can only be done where infections and hospital admissions continue to drop, people take up the vaccine when they are called and our need for critical, intensive and enhanced beds continues to reduce.

Please do keep following the rules as closely as you can and help us help as many people as we can – including, most importantly, our wonderful staff.

Take care,

Kevin McGee

Chief Executive, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Positive

VACCINATION PROGRAMME GOES FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

Trust teams have continued to support the Fylde coast's vaccination programme, working alongside its partners.

There are now 14 centres across the Fylde coast including the centre at Blackpool Victoria Hospital and the area is now on track to meet its goal of offering everyone in the top four priority groups a jab.

Until now, the NHS has asked people to wait until they are contacted to help ensure those who are most vulnerable are protected first – and that remains the case for most people.

However, to ensure absolutely everyone is offered the vaccine, people aged 70 and over can now contact the NHS so they can be vaccinated by the middle of this month.

BLUE SKIES' CHARITY'S VALENTINE'S DAY TREAT FOR TRUST STAFF

The Trust's charity, Blue Skies Hospitals Fund, has distributed 250 care packs to show their love for their frontline NHS staff this Valentine's Day.

Now the charity has set up an online message board where people can leave a few words of thanks for healthcare staff along with a donation.

Messages left will be circulated to all staff within the Trust as an extra boost of morale. The Valentines packs contain body wash, a bath bomb, moisturising cream and a little chocolate and juice drink. Plus, Baylis & Harding have very kindly donated 250 bottles of luxury hand soap.



Head of Blue Skies, Kila Redfearn, said: "We can't thank our supporters enough for their help over the past year, but we're still not out of these challenging times. Our wonderful NHS staff are still trying to get through this gruelling time, so hopefully even just a little pack of goodies can help them relax after their long shifts."

Donations will go directly to Blue Skies Covid-19 Appeal that supports staff and their wellbeing. To leave a message and donation, visit <https://visufund.com/love-your-local-nhs>

NURSE REWARDED FOR 'GOING THE EXTRA MILE'

A nurse who set up a telephone triage system to support women requiring a coil has been praised by her colleagues.

Jennifer Schofield, Senior Sexual Health Nurse based at the Blackpool Sexual Health Services team, has worked over several years to establish the telephone triage system for patients looking to have a coil fitted.



Jen volunteered to help, producing the necessary template documents for the service, and carrying out a three month trial. She then proceeded to train colleagues to work in the triage service, and over more than three years has helped expand and improve it.

She explained: "When the idea was first put forward, I volunteered to help and as I had created the template documents I wanted to be involved in the triage service itself. I learned all about the different coils and their effects on the body, and as time progressed I started to train other members of staff. Then it was like a ripple in the water once other people were able to do it.

"Since then we've changed details like making more time slots available for the telephone clinic. It's been audited and been recognised as a very beneficial thing. A lot of ladies are getting much better care and we're receiving positive feedback from patients and staff."

Going The Extra Mile is an initiative designed to help staff highlight the incredible work that goes on in the Trust every day.

People Centred

DR GARDNER'S WEEKLY VIDEO UPDATE

The Trust's well known Medical Director Dr Jim Gardner is building quite a following on our YouTube and social channels with his weekly video blog, which have been viewed hundreds of thousands of times by people looking for the latest local news on our response to Covid.

You can view the latest episode [HERE](#) and please do subscribe to the Trust's popular YouTube channel for all our latest digital content.



Compassionate

OFF DUTY STAFF MEMBER HAILED A HERO

An off duty healthcare worker from Blackpool Victoria Hospital has been hailed a hero for helping a vulnerable member of the public avoid potentially fatal harm.

Michael Smytheman, 39, an Emergency Department Assistant at the Vic, recognised a woman standing in the middle of a busy road, in obvious distress and immediately stepped in to help.

Michael said: "I was driving home along Newton Road when I saw a woman in the middle of the road. It was lashing down with rain and she had no coat on and was wearing slippers. I recognised her from being a patient and I remembered she was epileptic so I needed to help.

"I turned the car round and parked up and dialled 999 to explain the situation and ask which service would be best in the circumstances. I spoke to the patient who was in obvious distress.

"Luckily, a nurse from the hospital was walking home from work. She continued the phone conversation while I tried to calm the patient down."

Police arrived quickly and Michael accompanied them and the patient to the Emergency Department to get her booked in for treatment.

Blackpool Victoria Hospital Oncology nurse, Becky Ingham, happened to be walking home and witnessed Michael helping the patient.

She said: "I saw Michael in the middle of the road helping a distressed and vulnerable lady. I went over to see if I could help in any way and carried on the phone conversation with the emergency services while Michael tried to calm the lady down. Michael was absolutely brilliant in how he dealt with her and how he handled a very difficult situation.



“I was so impressed with his efforts. He had a wonderful nature and was so reassuring, managed to keep her safe and essentially saved her life. I felt he demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to his profession and acted with compassion and courage. He was a hero.”

Excellent

DISCHARGE TEAM IS SUPPORTING PATIENTS

The Single Point of Discharge (SPoD) programme was introduced at Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in December 2019, and in just over a year has streamlined the Trust’s approach to patient discharge and provided better patient outcomes.



Introduced on a select number of wards in the winter of 2019, SPoD was extended to all wards in the Spring of 2020 and the team is now better facilitating pathways for discharge.

Charlotte Hamer, Service Manager for Single Point of Discharge, said: “SPoD has been introduced to do exactly what it says on the tin, to be one single point of discharge, to try and make everything more streamlined and improve the discharge process for ward staff but ultimately our patients.

“It is a very specialist team, with staff members very experienced in discharge planning and community services. We have the responsibility of keeping up to date with the in depth knowledge all of the different changes and developments in community to maintain the best possible support for our staff and our patients.”

POSITIVE COMMENTS

A patient wrote in to praise the staff on Ward 11:

“I would like to give a huge sincere and heartwarming thanks to Ward 11 for continuing to look after one of our own and our support staff.

Highlighting that during these tough times, both NHS physical health and mental health come together to provide the best possible ‘person centred care’.

“Teamwork at its finest.”

Mum Danielle sent us this message:

“I would just like to say how amazing the ophthalmic department at Fleetwood hospital Pharos Street really are.

“My three year old daughter Alice had her regular eye test on Thursday, she was scared and everyone wearing PPE made her more nervous. But the two gentlemen who review my



daughter made her so much more at ease, she phoned the whole family afterwards telling them how she played eye games with them and can't wait to go back to see them.

"Keep up the amazing work guys it's much appreciated xx'."

New mum Victoria thanked our Midwives for their support:

"I would like to leave a review about the amazing midwives that looked after me and my baby during birth.

"It's been three weeks since I gave birth to our beautiful daughter, and I just want to say a huge thank you to the amazing midwives on delivery suite, Jenny who looked after us on the night shift and then Monique and her student Abbie the following day when our daughter was born, the anaesthetists and doctors who were so friendly and reassuring, they were all fantastic! Thank you."