

Dear Colleague

**14 December 2022**

Thank you very much for everything you have done and continue to do for our population in Northern Ireland and all those receiving care as we head towards a really busy winter period. Whether you provide direct care, support colleagues or lead services and teams, we know your contribution is making a major difference for the community we serve.

The past few years have been some of the most challenging that health and social care and our professions have faced in modern times. It's clear that there will be further challenges ahead over the coming weeks and months as we look towards winter. We wanted to take the opportunity to express our profound gratitude for your continued professionalism and hard work and to renew our assurances of support.

As we all know, there is already sustained additional demand across all sectors and settings of health and care provision. This pressure is likely to be exacerbated by staff shortages due to sickness or caring responsibilities. The impact on staff both personally and professionally will be significant and potentially prolonged throughout the coming months.

We recognise this winter will be difficult and that you are likely to have concerns about both the professional practicalities and implications of working under sustained pressure. We are committed to doing what we can to ensure you are, and feel, supported and safe.

We are confident all of you will continue to respond and carry out your duties professionally, informed by the values and principles set out in our respective professional standards. We're sure you will have a clear focus on the individuals you are caring for, and also on those people in the wider system and community who may also need care and treatment.

In such challenging times, when you may need to depart from established procedures to care for people, we understand some could be fearful that they could be referred to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). Please be assured that your professional code and principles of practice will guide and support your judgments and decision-making in all circumstances. This includes taking into account local realities and the need at times to adapt practice in the light of significantly increased national pressure. In the unlikely event that you are referred to HCPC, they will consider the context you were working in at the time, including all relevant resources, guidelines or protocols.

It is the responsibility of all employers and leaders to ensure that all professional practitioners working in their organisations are well supported in their work, and that channels for raising and acting on concerns remain open and accessible to all staff. We expect employers, educational supervisors, professional bodies, national health and social care organisations to be flexible in recognition of the challenging and changing landscape we are likely to face.

We will continue to monitor the situation and share information via the existing quality forums. National regulators will also take into account the need to keep regulatory oversight

proportionate at this busy time, whilst maintaining the focus on patient safety and protection of the public.

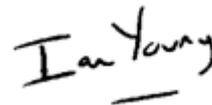
We all need to support one another during this time, ensuring that, as part of a team, we recognise the impact of coping in challenging circumstances, providing support and advice as it is needed. It is, and is going to remain, hard going, and mutual support between professionals is essential. Asking for help from others when you need it is good professional practice. We ask that you also seek support from your organisations if you need it.

Finally, we would like to thank you again for all the tireless efforts you have and continue to make to provide the best possible care for patients and the public.

Yours faithfully



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