From Dr Sarah Wollaston MP, Chair

Simon Stevens
Chief Executive, NHS England

9 November 2017

Dear Simon,

I understand from correspondence I have received that concerns have been raised about the outsourcing of NHS General Practitioner pensions management to the private provider ‘Capita’ by NHS England.

There have been suggestions of widespread discontent amongst GPs that, more than 18 months after taking over Primary Care Support England (PCSE), problems with the service run by Capita are continuing to cause destabilisation to General Practice across England.

I am sure that you are aware that in a letter to NHS England published in October, Derby and Derbyshire LMC warned that patients were being put at risk by delays in transferring records, undermining practices’ ability to guarantee patient safety and data protection. According to the letter, delays and errors with vital payments are threatening trusts’ cashflows, while mishandling of pension payments is damaging the work and morale of GPs.

The BMA General Practitioner Council Chair Dr Richard Vautrey has stated that improvement had been promised repeatedly from Capita after repeated demands from the BMA, but has ultimately failed to materialise. He claimed, “LMCs are receiving daily complaints about practices getting the wrong payments, or no payment, and spending an inordinate amount of time chasing payment.”

I would be grateful if you could let me know what assessment NHS England has made of the concerns which have been raised surrounding the outsourcing of GP pensions, and whether, following new developments such as the letter from the above LMCs, your assessment of the efficacy of this process has changed.

I would expect the Committee to wish to publish your response.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Sarah Wollaston MP
Chair of the Committee
Dear Sarah

Thank you for your letter of 9th November about Primary Care Services England (PCSE) that have been raised by Derby and Derbyshire LMC and the BMA. Simon has asked me to respond as the relevant national director.

We agree that there have been real challenges as these services transferred from disparate local offices to new sites and as PCSE worked through the early stages of the change programme. Despite that challenging start, services have improved during 2017. We have seen this demonstrated through improvements in performance levels and customer satisfaction, as measured by PCSE’s six-monthly survey which goes out to a large cohort of service users. The latest results show that satisfaction has almost doubled since December 2016 across the primary care contractor group. However, we are not complacent and are very aware that there are further improvements to be made for GPs. NHS England and Capita are committed to delivering them as a priority.

Your letter covers three main areas of Primary Care Support and we have outlined some information on these areas below.

1. Medical Records

The medical records service reported 91.3% of records were delivered to the new practice within 12 days of collection from the previous practice during October 2017. The courier service has been enhanced by adding additional routes and larger vehicles to enable a regular weekly collection and delivery service across England. PCSE is also in the process of rolling out a new records movement service to all practices nationally. This improved service results in greater information governance compliance with scanning on collection and delivery, providing traceability and tracking of medical records.

The introduction and phased roll-out of the solution is progressing well and is expected to complete in line with our agreed plans, bringing the benefits that NHS England has set out and that GP representative bodies have supported.

It should be noted that medical records movement is dependent on practices releasing records following a deduction. Whilst PCSE will make the request for release, it cannot guarantee its release. Additionally, a number of medical records remain located at NHS England third party storage locations. These third party providers have disparate...
arrangements for recalling records and inconsistent inventory information which can cause delays in accessing the records they hold.

PCSE have been able to identify practices that are not releasing medical records in a timely manner and this month, have started working with these practices to ensure that the records are identified, released and delivered to the correct new practice. The transit labels will be delivered in phases in line with a timetable that has been discussed with BMA representatives. PCSE will be introducing weekly email alerts in 2018 to remind practices to release records following a patient deduction.

We have been made aware of a small number of incidents when the labels for record movements have not been delivered as expected. We are assured by PCSE that these have all been investigated and corrective action undertaken.

2. Pensions

We are aware of concerns relating to the administration of GP pensions.

Historically, not all GPs have been aware of the requirement to send annual pension documentation to NHS England or its predecessor bodies. We are working with the Pensions Agency to determine how best to address these historical issues, provide clearer information to GPs about their pension documentation, and support for GPs to make sure they can manage their pensions in a timely way.

PCSE are still reviewing a volume of queries relating to payments and pensions. PCSE have informed us that this exercise should be completed by March 2018. There may be some individual pension actions held within this volume.

PCSE processed all annual certificates relating to 2015/16, which were received by the cut-off date and were able to be validated, in line with national timescales. Certificates relating to 2015/16 and prior years continue to be received by PCSE and are being processed.

PCSE have confirmed that they now issue receipts and acknowledgements for all pension payments where the payee has supplied a valid registered email address.

3. Payments

We are aware that some practices have been experiencing difficulties with the payments transactions managed by PCSE. This is one of the final areas to complete recovery actions. PCSE has committed to a service improvement programme that will improve the service in the following areas:

- Query management – PCSE have created a standalone team that will focus on all queries relating to payments and pensions. They have commenced further recruitment and system improvements to allow them to deal with queries in an acceptable time frame by February.

- Centralisation of key payment and pension activities – PCSE are centralising payment processing at their new GP Payments and Pensions facility in Blackburn. This is to improve standardisation and control. The movement of services to this new centre was completed during August and September.

I hope this update provides you with the assurance that progress is being made and all
parties are continuing to work hard on resolving the outstanding issues. However, if you have any further queries or questions, we are very happy to meet to discuss these.

Yours sincerely

Emily Lawson
National Director: Transformation & Corporate Operations