

Briefing

October 2021

Armed Forces healthcare briefing and latest updates on COVID-19

This monthly brief is intended to keep you up to date on the provision of NHS services for the Armed Forces community, as well as latest information and guidance relating to COVID-19.

Focus on COVID-19

The NHS is responsible for commissioning healthcare for the Armed Forces community. The ongoing commitments for these services are specified in the [NHS Long Term Plan](#) and the underpinning document, [Healthcare for the Armed Forces community: a forward view](#).

As our Chief Executive, Amanda Pritchard, has said, this pandemic has had a huge impact on our staff, both physically and emotionally, and as we work to recover services, we must make sure that we keep this in the front of our minds. It will not be enough to simply keep working harder and to do more of the same. We need to bring the same spirit of innovation that saw us transform care in the response to the pandemic, to find innovative ways to tackle new challenges.

As we do so, we must, of course, continue to address inequalities so that all patients, whatever their circumstances, can access convenient care, and all our colleagues are supported to feel included and valued. Part of the answer is working together across systems to deliver the very best integrated care for our patients.

The Health and Care Bill, which will break down some of the barriers to closer working, is progressing through Parliament and chairs and chief executives have started to be selected for NHS integrated care boards as we prepare for integrated care systems to be placed on a statutory footing next April. We will keep you updated on what this means for us and our patients over the coming months.

COVID-19 latest advice

To access the most recent and up to date NHS advice about COVID-19, including symptoms, testing and vaccination, visit the [NHS website](#), which also includes advice about staying at home (self-isolation) and treatment for you and anyone you live with.



Health and wellbeing updates

NHS services for veterans - supporting the Armed Forces community

Commemorations were held on 7 October 2021 to mark the 20th anniversary of the start of UK military operations in Afghanistan. In the UK at exactly 11:00 in Afghan time, wreaths were laid at the Bastion Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, another wreath was laid at the Iraq and Afghanistan Memorial near the Ministry of Defence in central London.

Given recent events in Afghanistan, NHS England and NHS Improvement, together with our Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group, has been supporting the Armed Forces community, by raising awareness of Op COURAGE and other NHS services for veterans. This has included issuing Op COURAGE information to front line responders, sharing stories from veterans and their families, encouraging GP practices and NHS trusts to become veteran aware and veteran friendly and attending the [RCGP Primary Care Conference](#) with the Veteran Friendly Accredited Practices team to educate GPs on the health needs of veterans and services available to them.

Read about [How to get the most from your GP](#), as featured in Civvy Street magazine, along with a [message from Rob Shenton](#), NHS England and NHS Improvement Patient and Public Voice and lived experience group member, on getting help from Op COURAGE.

For more information on any NHS services for Service leavers, veterans, reservists, and their families, visit www.nhs.uk/armedforceshealth and follow us on Twitter @NHSArmedForces

BMJ Military Health Research published

Research published this month in the BMJ Military Health journal, '[Social and economic costs of gambling problems and related harm among UK military veterans](#)', has featured in the press recently, with the headline "Armed forces veterans 'more likely to be problem gamblers'". To read the full research report you can [download the PDF](#) for free.

The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service, [Op COURAGE](#) is already working with charities and local organisations to support veterans with wider health and wellbeing needs, such as housing, relationships, finances, employment, drug and alcohol misuse and social support.

Armed forces veterans are also set to benefit from extra support thanks to a [further £2.7 million funding](#) from the Government, which will include:

- additional mental health services through Op COURAGE
- tailored support for those with complex mental or physical trauma or alcohol, substance misuse and / or gambling addiction
- dedicated care co-ordinators to help reduce suicide rates.

Black History Month

This month is Black History Month, during which, individuals are sharing stories of diversity through the Proud to be, campaign.

Sue Liburd, MBE DL, is an Army veteran who served for seven years in the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps and the Deputy Chair and Diversity and Inclusion lead for the NHS England and NHS Improvement Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice (AFPPV) Group.

Sue describes what 'Proud to be' means to her and how the group supports the NHS to better understand the specific needs of the Black, Asian and minority ethnic Armed Forces community.

"I'm proud to be a daughter of a father that served in the RAF, a sister of a brother who served in the Royal Navy and a woman who has served in the Army.

I am also proud to be a member of the Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group, helping to shape healthcare provision for all members of the Armed Forces community. As a group, we are proactive in sharing lived experience expertise, including those drawn from the rich and diverse cultures found in the Black, Asian, Commonwealth and faith communities. It is widely recognised that negative stereotypes trigger discrimination and toxic stress on the part of the recipient. Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities face longstanding barriers with regard to economic, educational and social opportunities, which is why we ensure the voice of the underrepresented or minority is heard, together working to shape culturally inclusive healthcare commissioning.

The group regularly meets and works with NHS leaders, clinicians and staff to share its experiences of health care and to reflect on the experiences of the communities it represents. This is vital in helping to support improved health and wellbeing through a better understanding of the health needs of the Armed Forces community, particularly underrepresented minorities."

Military Veterans Service – Guidance for veterans

[The Military Veterans Service at Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust](#), which is also one of our Veteran Aware Trusts, has created some useful tips for veterans ahead of Bonfire night and Remembrance Day next month. Remembrance Day may continue to look different for some this year whilst COVID-19 remains present and Bonfire Night can be difficult for veterans as several reactions can be caused by hearing, seeing and smelling fire and fireworks. Please view and share the attachments with this briefing with your networks.

The RCGP presents, Shell Shock, By Neil Blower Watkin

Join a special RCGP webinar on Wednesday 3 November to watch an edited version of the powerful, innovative performance of "Shell Shock", which provides insight and raises awareness about veteran's health.

There is also the opportunity to learn more about the RCGP Veteran Friendly Practice Accreditation programme, with information on how GP practices can become accredited and improve care for veterans

To find out more and register for the webinar, visit [here](#).

Sexual assault referral centre (SARC) campaign

Work is due to commence on the development of an England wide sexual assault referral centre (SARC) campaign, which we hope to launch in the new year. The need for a campaign has arisen following the significant rise in domestic abuse / sexual assault and abuse since the pandemic, particularly during periods of lock down.

The overarching aim of the campaign is to increase the use of SARCs by people who need them, with a key focus on vulnerable communities. An important element of this will be involving those with lived experience and those working with and supporting the victims and survivors of sexual assault and abuse. We will keep you updated on the campaign and opportunities for involvement.

To find out more about NHS services for sexual assault and abuse, visit [here](#). To find a SARC, [visit the NHS website](#).

Winter access fund: supporting general practice and improving access for patients

The NHS, working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care, has published a [blueprint for improving access to GP appointments](#) for patients, alongside supporting GPs and their teams. Surgeries will be provided with additional funding to boost their capacity to increase the proportion of appointments delivered face to face, as part of a major drive to support general practice and level up performance, including additional efforts to tackle abuse against staff. The measures, including a £250 million winter access fund from NHS England and NHS Improvement, will enable GP practices to improve availability, so that patients who need care can get it, often on the same day if needed. The investment will fund locums and support from other health professionals, such as physiotherapists and podiatrists, with a focus on increasing capacity to boost urgent same-day care.

Public Health England colleagues join NHS England and NHS Improvement

Amanda Pritchard, NHS Chief Executive, has welcomed colleagues from Public Health England (PHE), who, earlier this month, transferred to NHS England and NHS Improvement, following PHE ceasing as an organisation. Its functions have transferred to the new UK Health Security Agency, the Office for Health Promotion and Disparities in the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS Digital and NHS England and NHS Improvement.

New public health colleagues with NHS England and NHS Improvement, include the following teams:

- Regional screening and immunisations support teams
- National screening functions
- Screening Quality Assurance Service (SQAS)
- Regional Healthcare Public Health teams
- National Healthcare Public Health colleagues

Professor Yvonne Doyle is taking on a new role at NHS England and NHS Improvement as the Medical Director for Public Health. Working with our National Medical Director, Steve Powis, Yvonne is supporting the transfer of public health staff to our organisation and ensuring the NHS has a strong focus on population health as part of its recovery. Yvonne has been a member of the PHE Executive team for a number of years, playing a major part in their response to the pandemic.