

TO:

All CEOs Acute trusts
All CEOs PCTs
All CEOs Foundation Trusts
All CEOs SHAs
All Directors of Performance SHAs

CC:

Monitor

Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS
david.nicholson@dh.gsi.gov.uk

1 July 2010

Gateway reference number: 14476

Dear Colleague,

Lessons learned from the H1N1 (swine flu) pandemic.

The independent review of the UK swine flu response led by Dame Deidre Hine, has been published today. This report focuses on the UK wide strategy used to manage the consequences of the pandemic, but not the operational aspects of the NHS response.

As part of learning from swine flu, two NHS operational reports have been produced, by the NHS Resilience team, which are also published on today. These are:

- Report of the swine flu Critical Care clinical group
- Learning the lessons from the H1N1 vaccination campaign for Health Care Workers.

Both reports highlight important areas of learning, which should be taken forward. Operational resilience in NHS services, as identified in the NHS Operating Framework 2010/11, remains a priority including preparation for winter and the possibility of another pandemic.

The critical care report builds on the work done during swine flu to increase critical care capacity, which was outlined in a letter from Ian Dalton in December 2009. The report incorporates key learning points for future surge planning. Most important is the recommended work for critical care networks, which must be robust and well prepared as the essential foundation of any response to surge in demand. Work is already underway on further consideration of ECMO with a multi-professional working group with representation from all UK Health departments.

The Vaccination report includes areas of good practice in encouraging uptake of vaccination by healthcare workers during swine flu. These suggestions will be incorporated into an update of the Green Book which will be published at the start of the 2010/11 seasonal 'flu campaign. We saw a significant improvement in the vaccination uptake rates during swine flu and I am keen to see this carried through into this years vaccination programme.

Work on the lessons learned from the H1N1 pandemic for social care will also inform revised guidance to this sector.

I would like to reiterate my sincere thanks to those whose effort ensured that the NHS coped with the swine flu pandemic. You continued to deliver high quality care to all patients and this was achieved through your leadership, dedication and hard work.

The swine flu pandemic tested out the resilience of the NHS but, although putting pressure on services, did not require us to fully implement surge plans. It has however provided an opportunity to incorporate lessons learned across the whole system in order to sustain flexibility in responding to the demands of whatever situation we may face.

Boards are asked to take action now to ensure that the recommendations of both these reports are incorporated into their organisations plans.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Nicholson', written over a thin vertical red line.

Sir David Nicholson KCB CBE
NHS Chief Executive