

**Sent via e-mail**

NHS England and NHS Improvement  
**East of England**

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Dear Colleagues,

As the NHS approaches what is always an extremely busy time of year, and on top of what has already been an extremely demanding year, I am writing to you to express the gratitude and appreciation of NHS England and NHS Improvement - East of England's regional team, for your continued hard work.

We know this has been an exceptional year, and the response of General Practice to the COVID-19 pandemic is something you can take great pride in.

At the height of the pandemic earlier this year, we avoided being overwhelmed by retooling the NHS to treat the huge number of patients who were seriously ill with the virus. The way in which General Practice responded to this COVID-19 surge was remarkable in delivering a responsive, patient-centred and agile GP service. This meant that you adapted your services to keep patients and staff as safe as possible.

Everyone in primary care played their part. Transformational new ways of working were introduced rapidly, such as the assessment of patients on the telephone or via video link to enable you to remotely, and more safely, support as many of your patients as possible.

Patients have been supportive of remote consultations, and of other new ways of working. You have done so while fully taking into account their needs, including maintaining face to face consultations when they are needed.

It is excellent news that the number of overall appointments in primary care – face to face, telephone, and video – is now at near pre-COVID-19 levels across our region.

All of this has been done at a time of immense pressure, and with the need to protect yourselves, your staff and your patients from being exposed to the virus.

Having achieved so much together, I am sure this puts us all in a good place to face the challenges that now lie ahead for the delivery of health services over winter.

It is clear a second wave of the virus is appearing across the country. So far, the East of England has not experienced the increased number of new COVID-19 cases experienced in other parts of the country. However, we must remain vigilant and continue to be ready for dealing with an increased number of cases in the event of this happening.



Having pulled out all the stops to treat COVID-19 patients, the NHS is now focusing on the needs of all routine patients too and the care they may need – whether for cancer, diabetes or other illnesses.

The number of cervical screening tests being undertaken is now almost achieving pre COVID-19 levels across the region. This is a significant achievement and indicates that practices are providing face to face care when needed and patients are confident to come forward for cancer screening in a COVID-19 safe environment.

As well as this important work, you now have additional new pressures including the expanded flu vaccination programme and preparing for a second peak.

I am pleased to say that our first flu data shows there that there has been an extremely positive start to this year's flu vaccination programme, particularly for the over 65 age group. The majority of CCGs in the East of England have already vaccinated between 20-30 per cent of people in this age group, with two CCGs having vaccinated over 30 per cent – a remarkable achievement all round.

And finally, as we approach winter, we know will we face an increased seasonal pressure on health services. We are working with systems to implement the NHS 111 First offer to provide low complexity urgent care without the need for an A&E attendance, ensuring those who need care can receive it in the right setting more quickly.

You have a vital role to play in this work that lies ahead, as you continue to be the first person many patients turn to when they feel unwell. Given all that you have done this year, we know that you will continue to ensure your patients receive the best possible care from you, when they need it.

The leaders of your CCGs have been working closely with our regional NHS England and NHS Improvement team, and we are fully aware of the great work you are doing. Much of your work we have shared with our national team as excellent examples of good care.

As it has been such a tumultuous year, and one that is far from over, we want to thank you for all your dedication and hard work, and which you continue to provide for your patients.

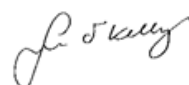
You and your colleagues rose to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are fully aware that you have already risen to the challenges we about to face.

Please do share this message with your entire practice team, as everyone has had a part to play in what has been achieved this year.

Best wishes



Ann Radmore  
**Regional Director**



Dr Sean O'Kelly  
**Regional Medical Director &  
Chief Clinical Information Officer**