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Health Select Committee pandemic report

Amongst other things, Parliament's Health and Social Care Select Committee called for improvements in referral handling at the primary/secondary care interface, better staff testing (including for GPs and staff) and quoted evidence highlighting:

Problems with information flow between primary and secondary care.

Difficulties in GPs getting investigations booked/ tests conducted.

More risk aversion when working remotely/digitally.

Cited figures showing reduced GP appointments during the pandemic (33%), and a drop of 76% for urgent cancer referrals during the period.

There are also comments around the use of digital with references to GPs and the new NHS 111 First programme.

The report highlights that urgent action is needed to tackle a treatment backlog and an unknown level of demand for all health services, particularly with regard to cancer care, mental health services, dentistry, general practice services, and elective surgery.

The report said that a "compelling case" had been made for rolling out routine testing of all NHS staff. The MPs said that they had accepted advice from scientists that there was "a significant risk that not testing NHS staff routinely could lead to higher levels of nosocomial infections in any second spike" and had asked the government why routine testing was not already in place.

The report also mentions that the government and NHS England must set out by the end of October what they require to be able to offer routine tests to all NHS staff nationwide. Routine staff testing must be rolled out "as quickly as capacity allows, [and] certainly before winter," it said.

Evidence came from royal colleges, medical leaders, NHS bosses, think tanks, and patient groups, - many of whom raised concerns about the "mismatch" between the instruction from NHS England not to stop cancer services during the pandemic and evidence it received that cancer services had been "severely disrupted."

The report criticised the government and the NHS for "poor communication" over the availability of care during the pandemic, leading to "unnecessary anxiety and stress" for patients. "For some, the patient experience had been unacceptably poor, leaving them feeling left 'in the lurch,'" it said and urged NHS England and NHS Improvement to review its advice to local NHS trusts about how to communicate with patients about the progress of their treatment.

The report emphasised the importance of a "consistent and reliable" supply of appropriately fitting personal protective equipment to all NHS staff in advance of winter and a potential second wave, as the government promised earlier this week.

The full report can be viewed as webpages and a PDF.

The report's conclusions and recommendations can be viewed [here](#)