

Hon. Secretary's Report 2022

As we reach the other end of the covid tunnel, we are presented with the problems caused by the pandemic. These are basically an increased burden on secondary care, resulting in proposed pathways which rely on community optometry practices and increased stress and potential deterioration of mental wellbeing amongst workers within our profession.

Prior to Covid, enhanced pathways were funded on a break-even basis at best and ultimately operated on good will. Covid changed everything – operating costs and demand increased as capacity reduced, resulting a large backlog of those requiring eyecare. What was break even at best has now become loss making. The drop-out rate of previously commissioned enhanced services means that the NHS and commissioners really need to have a good look at the reasons behind this (namely beaurocratic demands and un-economic fees) and approach our profession from a realistic starting position. Should they do this, I have no doubt that our profession can perform a valuable role in the provision of eye care in Norfolk & Waveney. If they don't, I fear they will be disappointed with patients suffering further as a result.

Thankfully – the past few months have seen an active interest in the mental wellbeing of primary workers. Funding has been made available by the NHS and resources put in place, along with regular communications signposting these.

The wheels of change move slowly within the NHS – hopefully this next year will see the NHS realise that it can no longer take our profession for granted and start to treat it with the same priority and respect that it affords other primary care professions. We'll see.

Ed Adkins

Secretary Norfolk & Waveney LOC