



Royal College  
of Surgeons

ADVANCING SURGICAL CARE

Dear Colleagues

### **Managing winter in the NHS in England**

The NHS faces arguably its toughest winter ever. Demand for emergency care is rising, the challenge of finding community and social care places is not abating, and waiting lists are growing at an alarming rate. This is set to get even worse: thinktanks have warned NHS funding per person is due to fall in 2018/19.

The ultimate solution to these pressures lies with the government's readiness to tackle the problems in the wider system. That means more funding for our staff, hospitals and social care, as well as protecting beds, to put the NHS back on a sustainable footing. Now more than ever, it is essential for national leaders to value and support our entire surgical workforce.

We recognise also that we, the surgical community, must continue to do everything we can to help manage pressures this winter. By giving proportionally more of our time to support the front door of the hospital we will give ourselves and our patients the best chance of returning elective care to a more reliable footing in the spring. The *Getting It Right First Time* programme, led by Professor Tim Briggs, confirms that surgical triage with senior decision-makers can significantly reduce unnecessary emergency admissions, ultimately creating the capacity to restore elective throughput and allowing surgeons to do what we do best: operate. In many areas of England senior surgeons are already successfully running surgical assessment units and rapid access outpatient clinics, as well as supporting A&E departments.

We are convinced that concentrating our efforts on managing emergency surgical patients over the winter is key. Each trust will have its own specific ways of managing the emergency workload and no-one expects surgeons to help in areas outside their expertise. We encourage you to be familiar with your local winter plans that cover resilience arrangements from the start of December up to Easter, along with the arrangements being put in place for the Christmas and New Year period.

We are in dialogue with NHS England to ensure that getting elective surgery back up and running is a priority after the main winter period, ensuring that our patients get the timely treatment they need and trainees the right level of training. We appreciate that much is already being asked of our NHS workforce. We believe further support this winter at the front door of hospitals, or its equivalent for receiving emergency surgery patients, will help patients to be admitted and discharged safely, protect hospital capacity, and demonstrate surgeons' continuing commitment to lead by example. This effort will only be effective if it is, in turn, supported by a commitment from the government to fund the NHS properly and sustainably. In the run up to next week's budget, we call on the government to do their bit and deliver on wider improvements and funding for the NHS and social care.

**The President and Vice-Presidents of the Royal College of Surgeons**