

Written evidence submitted by Mr Rupert Kett-White (WBR0018)

These are my personal opinions as a consultant neurosurgeon managing spinal problems which can cause paralysis and disability:

1 Before COVID-19 the NHS in Wales and locally for spinal surgery was inadequate – manifest by long-waiting times, high litigation claims for delays in MRI or access to specialist or surgery. Theatre provision had already been reduced because of theatre staff burn-out, despite increasing demand for spinal surgery and increasing waiting times and substantial breaches in targets. Main stress – theatre staff, poor recruitment after credit crunch 2009 – increasing staff sickness in an aging cohort of nurses.

2. Impact of COVID – almost complete cessation of spinal surgery except for emergency cases of acute paralysis – personally I was operating prior to covid on 20-25 patients/month – since its about 3/month. All surgery for pain, no matter how disabling, cannot be provided as theatre time (mainly restricted by lack of theatre nurses and anaesthetic assistants) is so short and has to be shared with other surgical specialities. For me it is frustrating not to be able to return to usual levels of productivity and efficiency – there is a lot of ‘hanging around’ waiting for emergency theatre.

3. The scale is devastating – patients and the public have no access currently to surgery that can improve their lives/get them back to work, restore dignity and activity. We have and continue to sort patients in clinic but increasingly there is no hiding the massive inability to operate.

4. Future projection – dire – without substantial recruitment and training of theatre and ward nurses, there will only be a trickle back of staff from shielding and sickness. Covid precautions require more theatre nurses per case than before, compounding the problem.

5. no there are not sufficient numbers in training – and ethically we should be looking to train nurses from people already living in the UK rather than stripping other countries of this valuable resource.

6 People Plan – I have not heard of this .

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