

Written evidence submitted by St John Ambulance (WBR0092)

Response to the Health and Social Care Committee's inquiry on workforce burnout and resilience in the NHS and social care from St John Ambulance

Summary

St John Ambulance welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Health and Social Care Select Committee's inquiry on workforce burnout and resilience in the NHS and social care. Our response is in relation to the following questions, which are relevant to our experience of supporting the NHS during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- How resilient was the NHS and social care workforce under pre-COVID-19 operating conditions, and how might that resilience be strengthened in the future?
- Will the measures announced in the People Plan so far be enough to increase resilience, improve working life and productivity, and reduce the risk of workforce burnout across the NHS, both now and in the future?
- What further measures will be required to tackle and mitigate the causes of workforce stress and burnout, and what should be put in place to achieve parity for the social care workforce?

St John Ambulance is the UK's auxiliary ambulance service and leading health and first aid charity. We have stepped forward at times of national crisis throughout our 140-year history, as well as providing seasonal support to the NHS during times of high demand through the winter months.

At St John Ambulance we have transformed our entire delivery to meet the needs of the National Health Service during the COVID-19 pandemic, placing our clinically trained volunteers and additional ambulance crews into communities and Emergency Departments nationwide. The ability of the NHS to respond to coronavirus has rested on having the staff and the facilities to care for patients; St John has liaised with NHS England and NHS Improvement from the very start of the crisis in order to support this.

We believe the NHS crisis support function that St John Ambulance has been providing throughout the pandemic should not be lost. Formalising St John Ambulance as the National Health Reserve would ensure that our clinically trained volunteers are ready and able to step up and support our health service in times of crisis now, and in the future. With a built-in expectation of support and proper resourcing, such a system would:

- provide certainty about surge resource capacity to support NHS and Government long-range planning for emergencies
- reduce the risk of a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic or more localised surges in demand suddenly overwhelming the NHS;
- alleviate the stress on staff by sharing the burden of care;

- promote opportunities for people to gain clinical skills and pursue a career in the NHS.

Policy Recommendation: St John Ambulance formalised and resourced to provide the National Health Reserve

In our response we outline the support St John Ambulance volunteers have given the health service in response to the pandemic so far; why a National Health Reserve is crucial to supporting NHS staff, both now and in the future; what we propose to deliver; and the mechanisms that need to be put in place to achieve this.

St John Ambulance COVID-19 Support to the NHS and communities

The clinical skillset of St John volunteers, unique within the voluntary sector, has enabled us to step forward to support the national COVID-19 effort and improve the life chances of the sick and vulnerable.

Despite the loss of our normal commercial revenue from first aid training and event cover, St John Ambulance has been able to refocus service delivery to assist the national effort with the backing of a £6.8 million grant from Government, via the £750 million charity support package. This supported the organisation's core functions for 12 weeks in the immediate crisis period, for which we are immensely grateful.

Since the start of this crisis, St John people have given over 200,000 hours of patient-facing care. We have delivered an essential service for our NHS colleagues at more than 50 locations, working alongside Trusts to identify an agreed scope of tasks within the Emergency Departments which are suitable for trained volunteers to assist with. These have included transporting, befriending and supporting patients; undertaking CPR; and noting clinical observations.

We have also provided ambulance services from 31 hubs involving, at the peak of the pandemic, 75 volunteer-crewed ambulances on COVID-19-related operations every day. In addition, we have supported community projects as needed in local areas – helping to transport doctors, caring for people experiencing homelessness, assisting with blood donations, and many other activities.

In a letter to St John Ambulance this summer, Professor Anthony Marsh, National Strategic Advisor for Ambulance Services at NHS England and NHS Improvement, wrote:

"I am writing to thank you and express my gratitude for the continued support, dedication, and co-operation that you have demonstrated from the initial stages of the Global Pandemic. I honestly believe that if we had not worked so closely, the ability of Emergency Ambulance Service within our Country to respond so effectively to the pandemic, would have been greatly hindered.

Without your volunteers and staff members, the country would not have been able increase the number of resources that we have been able to deploy. This has undoubtedly helped to relieve the pressure on the 999 service and ensure we have been able to save as many lives as possible. Your

members have been a credit to themselves, and yourself as a National Charity, and have shown themselves to be professional, caring, and skilful in the way they have conducted themselves.”

How a National Health Reserve could support the NHS and reduce the burden on staff

The pressure placed on the NHS this year has been unprecedented and there has never been more need to identify new ways of lessening the burden on staff as the pandemic stretches on and resilience wears away. A standing reserve of support provided by St John Ambulance in the form of a National Health Reserve would go some way to making sure the health service is not swamped and staff are not overloaded. A National Health Reserve would give certainty that our clinically trained volunteers could always assist hospital staff when needed in an emergency situation, as they have throughout the pandemic, providing vital assurance to staff and hospitals that they will always have the support they require.

Our proposal of a National Health Reserve is also likely to alleviate pressure on the NHS through encouraging clinically trained volunteers to take on permanent roles within the health service. We have already onboarded almost 500 new volunteers during the pandemic, including hundreds of airline staff who have been on furlough, to support hospitals in preparation for the winter (please see case study below). The experience people gain through working with us can serve as an induction to taking up other roles in the health service, filling workforce gaps. This sits alongside our dedicated work to increase NHS staffing capacity, announced earlier this year in partnership with NHS England and NHS Improvement for St John Ambulance to provide an NHS Cadets scheme, aiming to enroll 10,000 young people from under-represented communities into the health service by 2023.

Case study: St John Ambulance volunteer to healthcare professional

Dean Cowlard had been a member of the Cabin Crew at British Airways for 16 years before the pandemic hit. With aeroplanes grounded, Dean was furloughed and decided to sign up with St John Ambulance as a volunteer.

"I did my two days training with St John - the instructors were amazing, the way they bounced off each other and got us all involved. It made me proud to put the t-shirt on and say I'm a St John volunteer."

After his training, Dean was placed in the Emergency Department at the Royal Sussex Hospital.

"Covid-19 has given people a chance to reflect and focus on what's important - and what's important is people and community. I lost my dad three years ago to leukaemia. Being in an Emergency Department, looking after similar patients, made me think about my dad, and it made me proud. I'm not religious but dad was there with me, thanking me. I felt like I was making a difference. Volunteering with St John has made me a better person."

Following his experiences volunteering with St John, Dean took voluntary redundancy from British Airways in order to pursue a career in healthcare.

"A real plus was putting St John on my CV; it gave me the confidence to sell myself. After job offers from two healthcare providers, I have accepted a role with London Ambulance Service starting in October. I needed to make a change and volunteering with St John has given me the confidence I needed, showing me that this is the career path I want to take. This is where I belong."

What St John Ambulance could deliver as the National Health Reserve

We can provide a standing reserve of trained volunteers and ambulances ready for immediate deployment at times of high pressure on the health system, in agreement with NHS England and Improvement. This would involve clinically training an agreed baseline number of volunteers and maintaining a fleet of fully equipped ambulances to ensure readiness to step forward in any future health crisis.

Specifically, St John Ambulance would train and upskill at least 200 Emergency Ambulance Crew volunteers and at least 100 Advanced First Aiders / Treatment Centre leads to ensure their readiness to step forward in any future health crisis, together with a fleet of at least 120 vehicles including Treatment Centres and emergency ambulances, fully equipped to meet NHS standards. In addition, St John would continue to build a wider reserve to ensure that during a national crisis they could provide 20,000 hours of response a month during a declared national emergency.

What we need for an effective National Health Reserve

Financial support: To maintain readiness to deploy our volunteers at times of crisis, St John Ambulance would require a level of financial support from Government, with deployment costs agreed with the NHS.

Mechanisms for deployment of skilled volunteers: Currently, St John Ambulance is constrained in how much crisis support we can offer the Government and the NHS by the number of volunteers who are available to deploy when a crisis hits. Managing and preparing for surge capacity at times of crisis should be facilitated by effective mechanisms for enabling trained volunteers to step forward when needed in times of crisis. The Coronavirus Act 2020 makes provision for Emergency Volunteer Leave. Although this has not been triggered to date, we believe this process could prove effective in any future deployment of trained volunteers.

Inclusion in planning processes: It is essential that St John Ambulance's insight and logistical expertise in deploying trained volunteers to support the NHS is a formal part of future strategic planning and preparedness for potential health crises, such as by inclusion in future preparedness exercises and in national and local emergency planning. Specifically, the following should be considered:

- ⑥ **Provision for organisations who provide key national resilience functions in emergencies, such as St John Ambulance, to be included in national and local strategic planning and preparedness for emergencies.**
 - ⑥ **Civil Contingencies Act**
 - Included as a category 2 responders
 - Included in the Emergency plans and Business Continuity plans that Category 1 responders are required to maintain
 - ⑥ **Updating Civil Contingencies Act guidance**
 - Updating 'Emergency Preparedness' guidance to ensure organisations who provide key national resilience functions in emergencies, such as St John Ambulance, are part of Emergency plans and business continuity plans of category 1 responders
 - Updating 'Emergency response and recovery' guidance to include organisations who provide key national resilience functions in emergencies, such as St John Ambulance, as organisations that other category 1 responders in addition to ambulance services (e.g. hospital trusts, primary and community care services) 'may call upon'.
 - ⑥ **Civil Contingencies Committee/Secretariat**
 - Participation in Civil Contingencies Committee/ Secretariat

Conclusion

Our experience of providing significant and sustained crisis support to the NHS means we are confident we can deliver the National Health Reserve. Resourcing a maintained reserve of clinically trained volunteers, vehicles and equipment would provide Government and the NHS with the reassurance of a planned baseline of support in a crisis, enable effective long-range planning, and enable the volume of volunteer support provided by St John Ambulance to be significantly scaled up, building on lessons learned during this challenging year to provide resilience for the future.

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