



## **Dr Cathy Jack: COVID-19 Update to Staff**

Hello. Since Christmas, we in the Belfast Trust, have seen an 80% increase in the number of patients being admitted with COVID-19. That number is expected to rise exponentially. Within Northern Ireland we have the highest rate of Covid transmission across these islands. I don't need to tell you that this position is worse than it has ever been since the start of the pandemic and that is why we must take robust action now.

I want to outline to you today what we need to do to ensure that we are ready for the increasing numbers of COVID-19 patients that will need our care. First and foremost, we need to ensure that we have enough staff to care for these additional beds and we will also be opening medical beds in the Mater, in the Royal and in the City Hospital. For us to be able to do this everyone must play their part.

Any patient who no longer needs to be in hospital will be discharged, either to home or to a step down facility that is without exception as we need every hospital bed we have to care for the sickest patients who are going to need our care.

To increase the number of staff available to care for our inpatients we are down turning all but the most urgent and emergency surgery. We are also ceasing all routine face to face outpatient appointments and we'll be providing these virtually if possible.

In partnership with our trade union colleagues, we are asking that all staff voluntary postpone any planned, booked annual leave in the coming weeks. Never before have we made such a Draconian request, but this is where we are and this is what we must do.

I must be honest with you, we are entering the most critical phase of this pandemic, when the numbers will be at levels never before delivered and I need your help. You have all been outstanding over the past 10 months. So courageous, so willing and so flexible, and together we have achieved so much. But once again I am asking more of you, and once again collectively we must put our shoulder to the wheel. This is the crunch and we must show our metal and come through this.

However, I also want to reassure you we have already vaccinated 10,000 members of staff and we have the capacity to vaccinate all remaining staff that want to take the vaccine within the next week. Equally, members of the community are now starting to be vaccinated so there is light at the end of the tunnel. But first, we need to get through the next six weeks safely.

So yet again I am asking you to step forward as the world steps back to make sure that we are there for our family, our friends, for the people of Belfast and beyond, and that we do our absolute best to ensure that we can deliver the best care within the resources we have.

Colleagues, all I can ask is that you do your best, and I will give you my word that when you do your utmost and work in good faith in these extraordinary times you will not be criticised. Care for absolutely everybody will be impossible, but that is the fault of the pandemic and not of you. Thank you.