

Action Cerebral Palsy

Political & Parliamentary Monitoring

Week Commencing 30th July 2018

The increase in admissions because of recent hot weather, as well as reduction in staffing numbers and the concern over Brexit has led to a 'summer crisis' in the NHS, with claims the increased pressure could become the new norm as the population continues to age and recruitment levels remain stubbornly low.

It was recently reported that there had been an increase in admissions, primarily of the very young and old, related to the hot weather. It is not now uncommon to find hospitals almost constantly 'borrowing' resources from other departments in order to support A&E wards and, in some areas, the extra admissions are leading to delays for patients requiring planned operations.

More worryingly, the increased pressure is being felt at a time when morale amongst staff in the NHS is at record lows, with the number of vacancies in the health service continuing to rise, and fears of the impact of Brexit remaining unaddressed. Writing [today](#), one doctor said that high burnout rates and low morale were having a direct – and often negative – impact on patient care. New Health & Social Care Secretary, Matt Hancock, has cited NHS workforce as one of his key priorities in the role and has said that he will seek to raise morale amongst NHS staff.

These challenges are compounded by Brexit concerns. Four in five doctors believe that the NHS is at risk of collapsing after Brexit, with a brain drain of European NHS staff deepening the recruitment crisis. The survey, commissioned by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, found the areas of health care most vulnerable to a reduction in staff levels included cancer treatment.

The news that the NHS appears to be undergoing a 'summer crisis' may not shock or surprise ACP, however it will be of interest that the constant need to have doctors work in A&E rather than in their own departments is causing delays in diagnosis and treatment for other patients.

Overview

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Number of teacher training applications tumble

The number of people wanting to go into teaching has fallen by four per cent compared to last year, official figures have shown. The data, published by the admissions body UCAS, indicated that 40,750 people had applied for a teacher training course in 2018, compared to nearly 43,000 this time last year. Whilst the figures show an increase in applications over the last two months, the latest reduction will concern many in the profession who have seen the number of vacancies rise consistently.

More in-depth analysis of the data indicates there has been a 20 per cent fall in the number of people applying to train as Physics teachers, whilst Chemistry and Maths have also seen the number of prospective students tumble. This news is compounded by news last month from the Department for Education which indicated almost a quarter of teachers who have qualified since 2011 have left.

Additionally, figures published by the General Teaching Council for Scotland show that the number of teachers from European countries applying to work in the country has fallen ["off a cliff"](#), with a 93 per cent reduction in the last year alone. According to the Education Workforce Council in Wales, there has been a similar slump, with the number of EU citizens applying to work halving over the past three years. Data from the Department for Education for England is due out in November.

This news will concern the ACP in several ways. First, a reduction in the number of teachers will ultimately lead to increased pressure on resources, further diverting attention away from ensuring pupils with SEND get the quality education they deserve. Furthermore, the fall in the number of teaching applications coincides with reports from across the country which suggest that there has been a spike in the number of unqualified teachers in classrooms. One in 20 teachers in Wolverhampton do not have qualified status, whilst the figure is one in every 25 in Devon. Concerningly, it is unclear how many pupils with SEND are being taught by an unqualified teacher, in mainstream schools or elsewhere.

Whitehouse will continue to monitor the growth in unqualified teachers, and will report on any data published by the Department for Education. We will also contact the Teacher Recruitment Agency to request a meeting to discuss attracting more SEN teachers general and those with a cerebral palsy specialism specifically.

Drop in mainstream school SEND provision

Just a week after we reported that the number of children with SEND in England and Wales continues to rise, the number of mainstream schools with additional provision for children with special educational needs has dropped by 10 per cent in a year.

The Department of Education statistics show that, despite 1.27 million children, representing over 14% of the school population, having SEND, the number of mainstream schools with “resourced provision” or SEND units on site, has fallen to only 3,157 from nearly 3,500 in 2017. This means that 14 per cent fewer secondary schools have a dedicated SEND unit, and 61 per cent fewer schools are equipped with resourced provision. Among primary schools, the figures indicate there are 5 per cent fewer schools with SEN units and 11 per cent fewer schools with resourced provision.

Both types of provision are for pupils with dedicated education, health and care (EHC) plans, and schools receive £10,000 funding per plan in order to meet the needs of individual pupils. It will, no doubt, concern ACP that young people with cerebral palsy, who are encouraged to be assessed for an EHC, seem to encounter somewhat a lottery when it comes to SEND provision in mainstream schools. For many young people who do not live near, or cannot commute to, a special school, the lack of provision in mainstream schools can prevent students with SEND getting the tailored education they need to succeed.

Whitehouse will monitor any developments, including which local authorities, academies or schools report a reduction in SEND provision in mainstream schools. We will also suggest Parliamentary Questions around this theme to supportive Members of Parliament.

Virtual reality key to cerebral palsy rehabilitation, study shows

A virtual reality system, equipped with wearable haptic technology could help children with cerebral palsy rehabilitate their upper limbs, an Italian study has suggested. Attractive environments and repetitive, assisted training exercised have shown to improve the engagement of patients with neurological diseases in training session, as well as in exercise capacity.

A research team from University Hospital Pisa develop a system called Serious Game, composed of a virtual reality camera mounted to the head and two wearable haptic devices placed on two fingers. The Game successfully enhanced engagement of children in training sessions by allowing an interactive experience. Virtual reality experiences have the added benefit of being adaptive, meaning they can be tailored to the individual needs of young people.

Children who took part in the trial attended 16 training session over four weeks, over two separate periods. The children's exercise capacity was measured using validated clinical scales and motion analysis, and showed that over-time those with cerebral palsy developed better muscle and reflex control skills and strength, and were able to complete tasks within the upper time limit allowed.

This new development will be of interest to the ACP, given the degree to which the cost of virtual technology continues to fall, thus meaning the potential for helping young people with cerebral palsy in the future is great.

We will monitor for any developments as the trial enters phase 2 and report on final results.