Opening address

SPEAKER

• Chris Hopson, Chief Executive, NHS Providers

SESSION SUMMARY

• Chris considered “How should we lead the NHS in an increasingly difficult context”?

• The context is that the NHS is now operating in the “red zone”, above its sustainable limit.

• The NHS is in the midst of the longest and deepest financial squeeze in its history, while facing workforce shortages and the challenge of developing mental and community healthcare.

• Key performance and financial targets are being missed and 59% of staff working unpaid extra hours.

• No trust is currently able to meet all performance and financial targets and trust leaders are growing frustrated as they sense a return to the situation the NHS was in before the investment that began in 2000.

• Trusts have made huge efforts in recent years to stabilise performance and move towards financial balance, but trust leaders are now being asked to deliver it all over again.

• Chris identified four “asks” of NHS system leaders to support trust leaders.

• Recognition, and a single, shared view of, the difficulty of the current strategic context. While funding and staffing are growing, they are not keeping up with rising demand for services.

• A deliverable task – well run trusts must be able to succeed. At present the task is undeliverable with a mismatch of the funding and what trusts are being asked to do. It’s not just a case of trusts needing to try a bit harder. The NHS needs a budget settlement and deliverable plan with appropriate stretch.

• Trust, respect, and empathy for trust leaders who are doing all they can. If a few trusts were missing performance targets then this is likely to be down to local issues. If all trusts are, then it’s a system issue. There is a particular challenge to support leaders of the most challenged trusts, which often face longstanding local health economy wide issues. It’s not appropriate, for example, to call together the leaders of trusts struggling with A&E performance and say “improve or else”.

• More support for trust leaders. Rather than seeking to over-regulate the “straggler” trusts, system leaders need to ask them what support they need to deliver improvement.

• Chris then suggested four “gives” NHS trust leaders can offer system leaders.
1. A belief that the right management actions can make a difference, despite the strategic context.

2. Realism and optimism, despite the challenge.

3. A continued commitment to reasonable performance stretch and transformation.

4. Support for staff - shielding them from pressure so that they can provide outstanding care, tackling bullying and harassment, and improving the experience of black and minority ethnic staff – as set out in NHS Providers new report, *There for us: a better future for the NHS workforce.*

- NHS system and trust leaders must work together to lead the NHS at this difficult time. United we can be confident of success. Divided we will fail.