

From the President – July 2024

Welcome to the July 2024 issue of the Bulletin.

Published: 04 June 2024

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Read time: 4 Mins



The summer general election is finally over and we now have a new government in place. It is refreshing to have the opportunity to work with a new team and a new set of policies – but the challenges across healthcare remain the same.

A new government – time for optimism?

Our election priorities for the new government focus on workforce, access to digital pathology, genomics and better point-of-care testing. In the coming months and years, we will use all of our connections to lobby for pathology and patients and help ensure we see the funding needed to establish robust pathology services in the future.

Funding is predicted to be very tight, of course, and will need to be wrapped up in efforts to reform practices and delivery of services. There are, therefore, many opportunities for pathology given the potential of digital pathology, AI, automation and workforce changes, not to mention how improved pathology services can radically transform patient pathways, outcomes and the efficiency of healthcare in general. But we need to make it happen...

The theme of this issue of the Bulletin, 'Pathology at the cutting edge', highlights how novel ideas and practices are being developed across all of our disciplines that focus on prevention, diagnosis and therapy. Articles on cancer vaccines, phage therapy, T-cell treatments and gene editing are covered in this issue. Advances like these that affect patient pathways and radically alter outcomes are prime examples of how pathology can be a future game changer across healthcare. We will advocate for these developments and hope they attract support and funding from government.

Wes Streeting MP is the new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care in the UK Government. I have written to him and hope to have meetings with his team very soon. In addition, the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges will be reengaging with regular government meetings, which

I will attend. We shall also seek to reestablish our All-Party Parliamentary Group for Diagnostics and call on a representative spread of MPs to join with us and the Royal College of Radiologists to tackle some of the common issues facing our disciplines.

Devolved nations

Despite significant changes in Westminster government representation, it is business as usual for healthcare across the devolved nations, still governed by the existing administrations. I will be visiting all 3 countries in the coming months with many meetings, symposia and social events planned.

In addition, the College will be hosting its first Celtic Nations Summit – a 1-day face-to-face meeting involving RCPATH representatives with government pathology leads, clinical leads and regional RCPATH chairs from the 3 nations. This will allow a frank exchange around the healthcare challenges faced and a sharing of the ideas and solutions needed.

The infected blood inquiry

The recent publication of the infected blood inquiry (IBI) report was detailed and thorough and taught us many things about past practices. The decisions and events then led to the tragic deaths of many patients. There are many survivors and their families who are still living with the terrible consequences of those decisions.

We are considering the findings of the report closely to identify areas where we can work towards further improvements in the care and treatment of patients.

A key recommendation in the report is about the access by patients to their own records. The report calls for an audit of the system as operated in each of the 4 health administrations by the end of 2027, with the findings as to its level of success made public. As well as looking closely at the patient aspect of these records, it also calls for the degree of confidence held by health professionals to be measured. A major component of this needs to be improved interoperability, both between pathology systems, across transfusion services, between hospitals, between hospitals and GPs and across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The practice of blood transfusions and the administration of blood products has changed radically since the time covered by the report. As you know, involving patients in their care and treatment and informed consent is central to the work of clinicians today.

Much-deserved awards

The [College Achievement Awards](#) were presented recently. It was a pleasure to meet all the worthy winners across the various categories. In addition, the Pathology Portal, hosted by the College, has itself been given several awards, including the recent high commendation at the prestigious [Health Service Journal Digital and Literacy Awards](#) – well done to the wider team.

The future for medical royal colleges

Colleges remain so important for upholding standards, for training and assessment and for representing their members and their professions, to ensure their voices are heard and listened to – even more important at this time of major political change. This College will continue to do all of that. It has been a challenging year for the medical and healthcare professions in general. Relentless service pressures, industrial action and strained relations between the Colleges, the BMA and the GMC – notably over perceptions and handling of the physician associate's issue. It is vital that the various stakeholders engage and collaborate productively to deal with further challenges ahead.

We realise that we need to do even more to listen, explain and represent the views of our College members as part of that engagement and collaboration. At the same time, we appeal to the profession to ensure our College continues to have an impact – **this College is its members...**

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