

Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care

Sent via email

03 September 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

I write regarding the serious ongoing shortage of blood tubes and the impact it is having on the delivery of healthcare, NHS staff, and most importantly patients themselves. While we understand this is an unforeseen set of circumstances, it is still deeply concerning that we did not have national planning in place to ensure that an issue with one blood tube manufacturer did not impact the whole of the NHS' blood testing capacity. It is also deeply concerning that we continue to see a lack of public facing communications from either NHSEI or the government, providing an explanation of the issue and an action plan with timescales. Instead, frontline staff are having to contend with significant additional work in cancelling and reprioritising blood tests at time of unprecedented pressures in our health service, as well as facing unfair complaints, anger and criticism from patients for a situation not of their own making.

Surely ministers must now demonstrate publicly visible responsibility and take the necessary actions to address the shortage, whether through departmental leadership or given the severity of the situation through the COBRA process. It is imperative that the government explores every avenue to return us to a normal blood testing service, and we believe the following additional steps must be taken if we are to limit the already significant impact which is being felt by patients across both primary and secondary care settings.

The first, and most immediate need, is for significant public facing communication about the issue and what it means beyond what NHSEI is doing now, how long routine tests are likely to be disrupted for and what patients can expect in the interim period. Such communication is vital to reassure and inform the public. It will also help to mitigate against instances, which we are already seeing, of GPs facing abuse because they are following NHSEI guidance to delay routine blood tests due to the national shortage. At a time when doctors are working harder than ever, it is simply unacceptable that they are bearing the brunt of frustrations brought about by issues completely outside of their control. Doctors must also receive reassurance that they will be protected if claims or complaints arise as a result of the tough decisions they are forced to take due to the current shortage of supply.

There must be a clear plan put in place for what happens should the NHS run out of blood tubes before an alternative supply can be put in place. Once an alternative supply is put in place it will be important

Chief executive officer: Tom Grinyer



to get as many blood tubes to doctors as quickly as possible, through an evenly distributed approach to ensure that no one area is left without. Alongside this there must be ongoing reassurance that doctors will be supported to deal with the inevitable surge in blood tests once supply resumes. This must include continued public facing communications explaining unavoidable delays and where needed additional resource to support the increased workload. Worryingly, there is now a significant backlog of blood tests building up and colleagues are unsure how they will catch up with this work.

Finally, an investigation into the full circumstances resulting in the shortage and reassurance that robust measures will be taken to ensure this cannot happen again will be vital to regaining the trust of both patients and those working tirelessly across the NHS at this time. This report should be made publicly available.

I look forward to your reply and would be happy to meet in the coming days to discuss this critical situation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the first name 'Chaand' and the last name 'Nagpaul' written in a cursive style.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul CBE
BMA council chair