

# Caring Today, Planning for Tomorrow



**20 December 2021**

Colleagues,

It seems like no time since we were preparing for Christmas last year. Then we were in a position where there was great hope that a vaccination roll out was going to make huge differences to our lives, having been in the pandemic for 10 months.



And it has - the vaccine has played a huge role in keeping people safe by reducing serious illness and death due to Covid19. I am pleased that our staff stepped forward in huge numbers to avail of the vaccine to keep themselves, families, friends and patients safer.

But yet, we have just come through another year of sustained pressure where we have been stretched to our limits. I am in awe of how the entire workforce of the Health and Social Care system continue to step up to give more and more – even when it seems there is no more to give. I am so proud of the NIAS workforce who consistently lead from the front in this regard, and thank you for everything you have done throughout the past 12 months to provide the best care possible for our patients in the most challenging circumstances. The many compliments we receive every week from patients and their families make it clear just how much they appreciate the kindness, compassion and expertise you show to them and their loved ones at times of distress.

But I am acutely aware of just how difficult your jobs have been over the last year and will continue to be in the coming months. Whether you are working in an operational role providing direct patient care, whether you work in our control rooms, or in one of our essential support functions – you have all faced significant challenges as well as the impact the pandemic continues to have on all of our personal lives. I know how frustrating it is for those of you who spend many hours waiting with patients outside Emergency Departments, and how concerned you are about the resulting delay in responding to calls waiting in the community. I know how difficult it is for Control staff receiving repeated calls from anxious families asking when they can expect an ambulance, and knowing you constantly have many more patients waiting than available ambulances to despatch. And I know how often you don't get the proper rest periods that you should, when you should; and late finishes have become the norm rather than the exception.

These issues are very important to me. As I've said before, we must care for those providing care, and we will continue to do anything and everything that we can to support the health and wellbeing of our staff. As well as being the right thing to do, it's essential in order to be able to provide a service to our patients.

In particular, I've heard just how concerned you are about late finishes and rightly so. No-one should be expected to regularly work beyond the end of their working time. I understand the impact this has on your personal lives. I am determined

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that we address this issue and the senior management team is currently taking forward work to ensure that more often than not, staff finish their shifts on time. Pilots are currently running in Southern and Belfast divisions which are showing encouraging initial signs and are being welcomed by staff. We will be extending the learning from those to all areas and I hope in early 2022 all staff will feel the benefits of that work, and an 8 o'clock finish will mean that.

But 2022 presents us with another challenge, as Omicron could be our biggest challenge yet in terms of transmission. So we face a further very challenging period ahead, when once again you will be asked to go beyond what it is reasonable for us to expect, but when once again I know you will respond with the same professionalism and commitment you always do.

Now however, as the year draws to an end, is the time for us all collectively, and, more importantly, for you individually, to reflect on what you have achieved over the past twelve months – remember every baby born, every successful resuscitation, every person rescued from a road traffic collision, every stroke patient you attended, every family member you reassured on the phone, every person in distress who you comforted – every life you changed for the better. Many people will be with their families this Christmas because of you - the staff of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.

Now is also the time for you to be with those who matter to you. I want you to enjoy the time you get with your own family and friends because you deserve it – hours have been long, rests have been few, but still you stepped up.

I want to finish by thanking you for all your support over the past twelve months. It is another year where my pride in being the Chief Executive of this organisation has grown. I want to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year. And I want to thank your families and loved ones for the support they have shown to ensure you can deliver life-saving care to our patients.

I and my SMT colleagues hope to be out over the next week visiting as many stations and other locations as possible, mindful of the need to minimise our contacts. I hope to have the chance to speak directly with some of you then, and hopefully meet with many more of you in the coming year.

Take care, thank you and Merry Christmas

**Michael Bloomfield**  
NIAS Chief Executive

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