

To: • Dame Melanie Dawes, Chief Executive, Ofcom

cc. • Martin Seidenberg, Chief Executive Officer, Royal Mail

• Michael Brodie, Chief Executive Officer, NHSBSA

• Jo Farrar, Chief Executive Officer, NHS Blood and Transplant

• Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England

NHS England
Wellington House
133-155 Waterloo Road
London
SE1 8UG

26 March 2024

Dear Melanie,

Implications for the NHS of proposed changes to postal services

I am writing to you in response to Ofcom's call for input on the future of the universal postal service.

I have not set out a detailed response to your specific consultation questions but would welcome an opportunity to discuss our primary concern as NHS England - that any changes do not have a negative impact on the quality of the services that the NHS delivers.

Currently the NHS sends over 2 billion communications out to patients every year, of which approximately 70 per cent are sent via letter. While this requires much more detailed analysis to understand the full implications, we are concerned that extending delivery periods could create risks to patient care and outcomes, particularly for those more time critical notifications such as details of appointments and test results. There is also a risk that such changes disproportionately affect the most vulnerable, digitally excluded people who are most likely to depend on receiving communications from the NHS via letter.

We recognise that the NHS has a role to play in ensuring the appropriate and timely delivery of communications. As a result of current digital transformation programmes, we expect that the proportion of patient communications that are sent digitally (without the need for a physical letter) will increase over the next 5 years. However, there will always be reasons why physical letters are necessary, to meet the needs of those who are unable or do not



want to receive digital communications or where other postal services are needed for example to support the delivery of patient samples.

As you will be aware, the NHS in England is not one single organisation and is made up of many different organisations operating at national, regional and local levels, each with different roles and responsibilities but bound together by a common set of principles and values. Early discussions about Ofcom's proposals have created some concern within the NHS and amongst our stakeholders. We suggest that further discussions are needed with a range of NHS partners (including NHS England, NHS provider organisations and other NHS arm's length bodies) to ensure that Ofcom has a comprehensive understanding of the potential impact of any USO changes across all parts of the NHS to inform any future reform of the postal service.

If this would be helpful, we would be happy to help facilitate a workshop with key NHS stakeholders to discuss the proposals in more detail and how we can work together to ensure that any future changes do not create risks to patient care and outcomes.

I look forward to discussing this with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CHopson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chris Hopson

Chief Strategy Officer, NHS England