

Valuing and sustaining volunteering in Health: closing address

Thank you Paul, and good afternoon to you all.

I am delighted to join you here today at your conference on Valuing and Sustaining Volunteering in Health.

Scottish Government support for volunteering in health

This event is a great opportunity to celebrate the contribution that volunteers make to the NHS in Scotland – but to also discuss the key issues around volunteering in health and how we can do more to support volunteering in hospitals and the wider community.

It is extremely encouraging to see so many people here today from across the NHS and third sector. Volunteers have always been – and continue to be – very much part of the fabric of the NHS in Scotland.

I would like to share my thanks to all of you, and everyone across Scotland, whose contributions make it possible for volunteers to make the vital contributions that they do to the lives of families and communities all over the country.

The Scottish Government has long been a supporter of Scotland's proud tradition of volunteering in health. This is because we know that volunteering brings a wide range of benefits to people who access healthcare and services, to carers, families, and to our NHS and its staff

For people receiving care and services, whether in hospital or in the community, volunteers can offer their friendship and support, their experience and expertise, their time and attention.

For Scotland's NHS and its staff, volunteers can help to forge and maintain stronger links with local communities.

And for volunteers themselves, volunteering can be a fulfilling way of giving back to the NHS and society – and

that, of course, can be good for their own health and wellbeing.

Working together – Clear Pathway

It is timely we are meeting here today one year after the publication of the Clear Pathway guidance.

The Clear Pathway guidance encourages best practice in relation to the governance required for all volunteers and others who are working within health settings. It is designed so that third sector volunteering in health is safe, effective and person-centred. The safety of patients and the staff and volunteers who work within, and for, the NHS in Scotland is a priority for the Scottish Government and for NHS Scotland.

Many of the volunteers in health are directly engaged by the NHS itself, but we know that thousands of volunteers supporting the work of the NHS are working with third sector organisations.

And there are so many great examples of the wonderful differences that these organisations and their volunteers are making, all across the country.

For instance, in the east of Scotland, Artlink is increasing the opportunities for those who experience disadvantage or disability to get involved and enjoy the arts.

In the North East, Moray, Orkney and Shetland CLAN Cancer Support is providing emotional and practical support to people affected by cancer. Using their specialist knowledge and understanding, they deliver a range of person centred services helping people live with and beyond cancer.

And across Scotland, RNIB Scotland are supporting thousands of people in Scotland with sightloss, assisting them to live full and independent lives, and working with others to help minimise preventable sight loss.

Those are just a handful of examples demonstrating the fantastic work happening across Scotland every day.

Volunteers make a huge difference to the people receiving their support and their wider community. This is why Clear Pathway is so important. One of the key recommended actions of the guidance is for relationships between the third sector and NHS to be strengthened and maintained. This collaboration between the NHS and third sector partners is vital if we are to ensure volunteering continues to flourish in health settings. Adopting the Clear Pathway guidance will help ensure consistency across NHS Boards in the approach to managing third sector volunteering.

The Scottish Government is supporting Voluntary Health Scotland to undertake an evaluation of the Clear Pathways project to identify the progress that has been made since the publication of the guidance. This important piece of work will support the sharing of best practice by highlighting where NHS Boards and third sector partners are working well together. It will also identify the areas where issues and challenges remain.

I look forward to hearing about the outcomes of this research.

Scotland has a long proud tradition of volunteering in health settings, it is important we create a safe and secure environment in which it can continue to flourish.

Commitment to change

As we look forward to Volunteer's week at the start of June we are right to celebrate the important contribution of volunteers and volunteering to every part of Scottish Society. But we need to do more. Adult volunteering rates in Scotland have been static for over a decade, and disadvantaged groups are under-represented. It is important that volunteers and volunteering represent the whole population of Scotland, in all its richness and diversity.

Without taking action to engage and support people of all ages and backgrounds to volunteer throughout their lives, communities will lose out on their talents. And without

celebrating and promoting the benefits of volunteering to everyone, those individual benefits will be missed by many of those who may benefit most.

We are seeing positive changes on all these fronts. Widening participation and improving access to opportunities to get involved in a range of ways, across a wide spectrum of contribution, is crucial to the wider aim of creating a fairer, smarter, more inclusive Scotland with genuine equality of opportunity for everyone.

This requires action to ensure that more opportunities to volunteer – formally and informally – are open to and accessed by anyone, to increase the chances of people finding things that interest them and opportunities to move around as their circumstances change.

Volunteering Outcomes Framework ‘Volunteering for all’

You are probably aware that on 25 April the Scottish Government launched ‘Volunteering for All: Our National

Framework'. It was developed by the Scottish Government jointly with partners from the volunteer and community sector, local government and NHS.

The Framework aims to reduce barriers to volunteering for people from all sections of the community, regardless of their background. It will support third, private and public sector organisations to promote the value of volunteering. It celebrates the contributions that have already been made and will encourage everyone who wants to volunteer to take part. It seeks to build more links with communities, seeking opportunities to share resources and expertise at a grassroots level.

It has been developed in the context of the refreshed National Performance Framework, which provides a clear vision for Scotland, so much of which helps to reinforce the importance of the volunteering agenda.

Sustainable Volunteering

This Government is committed to supporting the development of volunteering in partnership with key stakeholders across Scotland but recognise that there are challenges which need to be addressed. Many volunteers work in demanding and emotionally challenging roles, support is required to ensure that their health and wellbeing is looked after. And our ambition to open up volunteering opportunities will require planned and coordinated action and investment across all sectors and by multiple partners to tackle barriers and build new approaches.

These challenges create opportunities for us all. We want to reaffirm our commitment to working in partnership with NHS Scotland and third sector organisations to drive and shape our ambitions for volunteering in the NHS and beyond.

Since 2011 we have funded the the Volunteering in NHSScotland Programme. Supported by the leadership provided by the National Group for Volunteering, the Programme, has an important role to play in raising awareness, driving improvement and consistency across

Scotland. The Programme continues to deliver significant pieces of work to help NHSScotland focus on improving the sustainability of volunteering and the infrastructure that supports it. Key pieces of work that the Programme will be taking forward include an improvement project to reduce delays in the recruitment process for volunteers; a pilot of a volunteer-led support model and recommendations to NHS Boards on how to structure their volunteer management programmes.

This is important work. I am grateful to the Programme and the National Group for all that they are doing. And, by working together and building upon the firm foundation provided by the Volunteering in NHS Scotland Programme and National Group, I look forward to seeing what innovations and improvements we can deliver.

I would also like to commend the approach that this conference is taking. It is great to see NHS and third sector coming together to explore how sharing their expertise and experience, strengthening collaboration and partnership can help address the question 'what

more can we do?' jointly. Building strong links and relationships between the NHS and third sector, sharing the wealth of knowledge and experience that is out there, is an approach that I want to see continue.

And I hope that you have all had the opportunity, today, to think about how best you and your organisation can work together with others to enable the future of volunteering in the NHS and contribute to the health and wellbeing of the people of Scotland.

Conclusion

Volunteering delivers huge benefits to every aspect of Scottish society. It is the golden thread that connects our policies across Government, our services, our families and communities.

It is key to our ambition of creating a fairer and more prosperous country with equality of opportunity for all, a country where everyone has the chance to make a difference.

The Clear Pathway guidance is key to helping make sure that the care and support that we are all involved in some way in planning or helping to deliver is of the highest quality, and that it is always safe, effective and person-centred. With the support of our new national framework for volunteering, we want to create a society where volunteering is the norm and everyone can gain the benefits it brings.

I hope that you have all enjoyed the discussions over the course of today, and the new connections which have been made will benefit the thousands of volunteers supporting health and care services across Scotland and contribute to maximising the impact that they make.

Thank you.

Word count: 1661 (approx 10 mins)