

8 September 2017 - NHS Improvement Pathology Networks Pathology Alliance Statement

Pathology services underpin NHS care. The Pathology Alliance, which represents the professionals developing and delivering these services, is committed to working with NHS Improvement to ensure that patients have access to high quality, cost-effective pathology provision wherever they live.

The Alliance endorses the optimisation programme's aims to reduce unwarranted variation and maximise benefits of collaborative working. Networks will reduce the impact of the staffing shortages currently seen in many areas, although investment in staff and their training remains a key component of any successful service. Sufficient numbers of appropriately skilled professionals are vital to achieving the aims of the programme.

The collection of reliable data is particularly welcome, and provides an unparalleled opportunity to understand the scope and scale of pathology services in England. Going forward, it is important that data are as accurate as possible so that comparison between networks is meaningful and any savings recognised. Investment in pathology services must not be cut before the benefits of a networked approach can be realised. Many of the most successful consolidated pathology services have required significant investment in the early stages to maximise long term savings.

While some pathology services have already undergone successful consolidation, it is important that those that have not achieved their objectives are not forgotten. Good practice should be shared but some of the most valuable lessons are likely to come from unsuccessful ventures, particularly those that map closely onto the proposed new networks. Repeating the same mistakes is likely to result in the same outcome.

It is vital that staff across the networks are supported and engaged in the planning and transition to the new service configurations, with time provided for pathology professionals to understand and lead this unprecedented change.

Although this proposal focuses on acute trusts, pathology services are not delivered in isolation. The needs of the whole health system must be considered, including primary care and specialised services.

The Pathology Alliance welcomes the Optimisation Board's assurance that the proposed networks are a starting point for discussion and not proscriptive. One size never fits all, particularly across pathology's 19 diverse disciplines, but these proposals are an important step in assuring equitable access to high quality, cost-effective pathology services for patients.

Dr Suzy Lishman, Chair, The Pathology Alliance

- **Association for Clinical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine**
- **Association of Clinical Pathologists**
- **British Division of the International Academy of Pathology**
- **British In Vitro Diagnostics Association**
- **British Infection Association**
- **British Society of Haematology**
- **Institute of Biomedical Science**
- **Pathological Society**

- **The Royal College of Pathologists**