

# Rescuing the health sector

The last figures for UK output and incomes from the ONS take us to end May. They revealed an 18.9% drop in service activity in the 3 months to end May. Unsurprisingly eating and drinking out and the motor trade led the falls, given the lock down impact. Less predictably the other two sectors the ONS singled out as the main drivers of the collapse were health and education, down 31.4% and 37.8% respectively. Many other private sector service areas had much smaller declines thanks to working from home, using remote technology and identifying key workers to keep the service going.

Getting health and education back to where they were should be a priority now. Ministers have said they want the full range of treatments to be available again on the NHS, and to see the backlog of delayed operations and treatments being tackled. So far the NHS has struggled to get back to anything like the capacity before the virus. It has also been unable to fill the private hospitals contracted to support it.

It is now policy to either have isolation hospitals for CV 19 or to have isolated and sealed parts of hospitals to contain CV 19 patients and those helping them. This should enable normal infection control procedures to resume for all the other work the NHS does. Some of the shortfall in work has been patients reluctant to attend medical centres and hospitals for fear of catching the virus when they already belong to an at risk group. The isolation strategy needs to reassure them.

Remote technology has allowed many private sector services to continue as before, substituting remote communication for the previous client and customer contact that was common. The NHS is learning to use this technology for primary care and for consultations with hospital doctors. Where treatment needs contact in a hospital between staff and patient then the hospitals have expertise in infection control and the staff must have access to high quality protective clothing and equipment.

The private sector is still willing to offer capacity to the NHS to help with the backlog. This coupled with the extra money many available for CV19, winter pressures and other issues should enable the health sector to recover more quickly.

It is important the government defends the proposition that choice is an important driver of innovation and Quality. Private hospitals can offer good service and extra capacity which the NHS buys into when it needs to.