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CQC says inspections suspended for covid-19 crisis will restart in autumn

Gareth Iacobucci

Routine inspections of healthcare providers that were suspended during the covid-19 crisis will restart this autumn, England's healthcare regulator has announced.

The Care Quality Commission will also conduct inspections of higher risk providers over the summer, it announced.

The CQC stopped all routine inspections of hospitals, GP surgeries, and care providers in March to allow services to focus on the covid-19 crisis.¹ In the interim period it has been checking up on providers remotely through its emergency support framework [ESF].

In a statement the regulator said, "As the situation evolves and the impact on the health and social care system changes, we'll be adapting the ESF tool to be used alongside our responsive visits and a managed return to routine inspection of lower risk services in the autumn. Inspectors are now scheduling inspections of higher risk services to take place over the summer."

The CQC said that since it stopped routine inspections on 16 March it had carried 12 inspections in hospitals (seven of which resulted from concerns raised by staff or the public), 17 in adult social care (11 because of concerns raised by staff or the public), and three in primary care (all of which were because of concerns raised by staff or the public).

Kate Terroni, CQC's chief inspector of adult social care, said, "It's in everyone's interests that staff are able to speak up freely and are not prevented from raising their concerns about quality and safety—and all providers have a responsibility to support their staff to share concerns safely without fear of reprisal.

"Staff have been going to extraordinary lengths to deliver good, safe care during this global crisis. If they are experiencing barriers to the delivery of that care we want to hear from them, and we are encouraged that so many staff have been brave enough to raise concerns with us."

But the BMA voiced concerns about the recommencement, given the huge backlog of non-covid care that patients would be seeking as the pandemic eased.

Richard Vautrey, chair of its General Practitioners Committee, said, "Over the last few months GP practices have risen to the challenge of completely reorganising the way they work so that they can safely and confidently continue to provide care to their patients during the covid pandemic.

"They have done this without many of the regulatory burdens forced upon them previously, allowing them

the space to innovate and dedicate more time to patients.

"GPC has long called for an overhaul of inspection processes, and now is the precise time for that, as we all reflect on learning from this crisis.

"As practices gear up for the surge in demand caused by a huge backlog of non-covid patients and care—which some practices are already experiencing—it is completely inappropriate to announce a general return to inspections right now."

¹ Seven days in medicine: 11-17 March 2020. *BMJ* 2020;368:m1073.pmid: 32193203