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3rd March 2010
PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL
Mr Paul Richardson
Trust Chairman
United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust
Greetwell Road
Lincoln
LN2 5QY

Dear Mr Richardson

I write in anticipation you will share this with the Trust Board.

I feel I must make you aware of my concerns about the balance between patient safety and targets and inform you that in my view the current bullish and sometimes ruthless pressure from above on the management team in my Directorate is unfair and unacceptable. Such a culture that has evolved over the last few months has caused a subtle but significant shift in the balance between achieving targets and the quality and safety of our service to the patient. I know that at senior management level it is easy to hide behind the obligation of doctors and front line clinical staff to only act in the best interest of their patients. However these are human beings subject and vulnerable to the very human characteristic of trying to be helpful and support their colleagues.

The Directorate has for some time been producing data projecting a likely failure to meet the 18 week target within the time scale being requested by other agencies. This has resulted in modified projections being produced but with caveats attached linking the projections to significant risks that may affect success. I do not feel assured from recent experience that the significance of those caveats was appropriately passed on and more worryingly is now denied. As a consequence the impression being given in recent performance reviews is that the Directorate has in some way failed to meet a commitment resulting in an insidious and remorseless increase of pressure that could result in poor judgements and staff taking risks with patient safety which, in normal circumstances, they would not take. I am sure that as Chairman you would share my concerns at this.

My understanding is that the previous Chairman of the Trust had raised the issue of the potential conflict between quality and volume and resigned as a result of his concerns being refuted. I believe someone needs the courage to admit that this organisation will continue to fail some activity targets and should concentrate on those targets that are accepted as having some clinical evidence based provenance and protect the quality and safety of the service to our users. I am informed that such a position could be negotiated under the National Model Contract which provides that where demand exceeds the contract properly formulated plans, including steps to manage demand, should be formulated.

I think it is essential that this Trusts senior leaders open up honest dialogue with those monitoring our performance to address this now.

Clinical Director