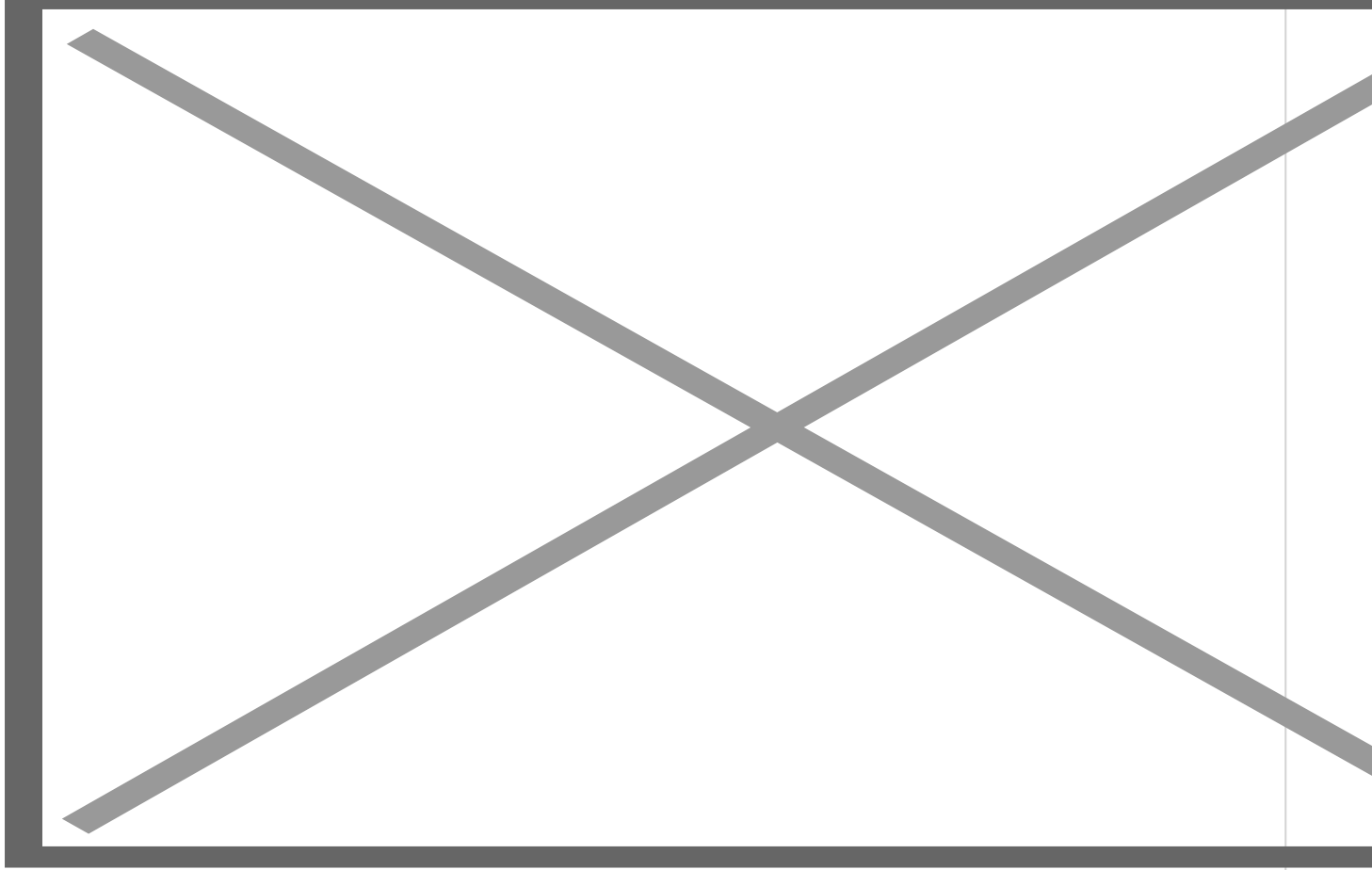


Overwhelmed by COVID-19, UK government turns to private companies for help

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A man wearing a protective mask walks next to an NHS sign at Cullimore Chemist, amid the Covid-19 outbreak, in Edgware, London, Britain, on January 14, 2021. (Photo by Reuters)

London, January 10 (RHC)-- The National Health Service (NHS), the publicly funded healthcare system in the UK, is seeking help from private health companies to deliver critical treatments such as cancer surgery, as the Omicron variant of COVID-19 keeps surging amid healthcare staff shortage.

Health Secretary Sajid Javid has ordered England's NHS to strike a 3-month agreement with private health companies to allow patients to get specific treatments, as the NHS hospitals are getting overwhelmed with COVID-19 cases.

David Sloman, NHS England chief operating officer and COVID incident director said on Monday the deal “places independent health providers on standby to provide further help should hospitals face unsustainable levels of hospitalizations or staff absences.”

The British government faced the highest level of hospital staff absence in early January since the vaccine rollout, data from National Health Service (NHS) shows. The agreement includes Practice Plus Group, Spire Healthcare, Circle Health Group, and several other leading private companies, according to the NHS.

Circle CEO Paolo Pieri said the company has been helping the NHS since the first COVID wave in March 2020, performing urgent treatments for over 400,000 NHS patients. According to the Spire Healthcare, under the agreed deal the company “will grant NHSE access to 100 percent of its facilities and teams on local, regional or national basis in the event of a surge of COVID-19 patients in NHS hospitals in England.”

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has expressed sorrow over the “terrible toll” of more than 150,000 deaths inflicted by the coronavirus in the United Kingdom. The UK’s death toll from the COVID-19 pandemic has reached more than 150,100, making it the world's seventh worst official pandemic toll.

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