**NHS SCOTLAND**

**POW Video Message – Script as delivered**

Ladies and gentlemen, I just wanted, if I may, to take this opportunity to pay a very special tribute to the extraordinary efforts you have been making throughout this dreadful COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the last year, staff working across health and social care, including carers and volunteers, have, I am fully aware, gone above and beyond the call of duty to deliver vital care to the people of Scotland under such incredibly difficult circumstances.

Despite what must seem to be often over-whelming challenges - and, in many cases, despite the most harrowing personal circumstances - you have continued to show outstanding commitment, dedication and compassion in keeping the country safe and providing care where it is most needed.

Your remarkable resolve and flexibility as you have so unexpectedly had to take on new roles and adapt to new ways of working across our health and social care system have been immensely impressive, as has the fact that you have proved to be so unfailingly resourceful when faced with an ever-changing threat.

The National Health Service is highly prized in this country for the care and support it provides in our communities. However, this year has brought home to all of us, as never before, just how much we rely on your skills, your devotion to duty and, in many cases, your sacrifice. I can only offer my deepest sympathy therefore to all those who have so tragically lost loved ones during this most challenging of times.

Under what must frequently appear to be impossible circumstances, that can only be exacting a terrible toll on your reserves of endurance and resilience, we really do owe you a tremendous debt of gratitude for your perpetual efforts on our behalf, for your selfless devotion and the vital human kindness you have shown in such unwavering commitment to providing the very best patient care to everyone.

There are so many moving accounts of people going that extra mile to help and I have heard and seen countless inspiring stories of how you have provided the most outstanding service to patients, to families and carers, while at the same time having to worry about your own families…

We are all, of course, keenly aware that the struggle against this pernicious virus is far from over. However, the vaccination programme now gives us our best hope for a return to a more normal life and I particularly wanted to express my heartfelt appreciation to everyone who is working so hard to ensure that the vaccines are developed, distributed and delivered, and that they are taken up as widely as possible.

This has been a year none of us shall ever forget. I suspect that it is not widely understood, for instance, that so many N.H.S. staff and different healthcare professions have been responding heroically to the demands of this unbelievably challenging time and have had to step outside their normal roles into unfamiliar settings in order to help deal with the pandemic. The whole N.H.S. team has, I am sure, earned the abiding gratitude of the people of Scotland.

 Although hopelessly inadequate under such unprecedented circumstances, I would just like to add my own special thanks to each and every one of you for your unforgettable service. We shall never forget those who have done so much to help their communities in their hour of greatest need.

**-ENDS-**