

8 April 2020

To all academic trainees

**As COVID-19 puts significant pressure on the NHS, many of us are being asked, or requesting, to return to clinical duties to support patient care.**

We, at the University of Exeter, strongly support this desire to do the right thing for patients, and have put together some guidance based on publications from the major research funders including NIHR, Wellcome, MRC and the Academy of Research Medical Charities (AoMRC), as well as the Royal Colleges, Health Education England, NHS Employers and the British Medical Association.

There are two basic principles that are common among all funders and employers

- If you wish to return to clinical practice, or are asked to, you do so with our **full and complete support**.
- All charities and funders have agreed “**You will not be disadvantaged by doing the right thing for the country at this difficult time.**” All schemes are working on how to extend awards and fellowships to allow individuals to return and finish their research.

There are several details that are being clarified between the BMA, NHSE, HEE and representatives in order to ensure that these principles can be adhered to, including mitigation for career (and therefore pay) progression and mechanisms to reclaim salary and time.

Currently the suggested model for working is for you to continue to be employed on your existing contract. If this is not with the NHS trust you plan to provide your clinical service to you should **ensure you have a valid honorary contract of employment** with the trust you plan to provide the service in. It is important that this is a contract of employment (with or without remuneration) in order to ensure that basic protections such as Crown indemnity are afforded you. If you have doubts about the status of your honorary contract, the BMA’s First Point of Contact (0300 123 1233 or [support@bma.org.uk](mailto:support@bma.org.uk)) have been trained in evaluating these contracts and can provide a checklist for employers to ensure the correct contract is delivered (the most common error that we have encountered, is that the wrong contract is issued by mistake which solely gives the right to work, but not the full protections).

Until all of the details have been finalised, we are asking for you to keep records of your non-academic activity for the NHS. This will enable the University to claim back the salary at the appropriate rate for the work performed, which will facilitate a seamless transition back to academia when this is resolved.

It is important to add that moving back to clinical work is **not compulsory**. Anyone who is working on time-sensitive projects, particularly work that could help combat SARS-Cov-2 should continue their academic work. Similarly, those who are at high risk, or caring for self-

isolating high-risk individuals should continue working from home according to the college guidelines.

For those that wish to join the fight against COVID-19, but do not necessarily have an honorary contract, or a natural affiliation with any a local NHS trust/GP practice, HEE are establishing a network to “deploy” clinical academics in areas of greatest need. Please contact your line manager to inform them if you plan to leave your local geographic area to perform this sort of work.

Finally, at this time of unprecedented stress and demand, we ask you to take a moment to consider your own wellbeing. There is a well-recognized tendency of all healthcare professionals, particularly among clinical academics, to work at the expense of our own health. We want you to be safe, not just for the population you will be treating, but for yourself, for your loved ones, and for the wider community, domestic and academic.

If any of the aspects of your clinical work affects your overall health, we would remind you, that even in these times of unprecedented demands, you can contact the university’s wellbeing service on 01392 724381 or at [wellbeing@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:wellbeing@exeter.ac.uk). This will remain a telephone and web-based contact service during the pandemic, however we want you to be reassured that the university is still there to support you. Alternatively the BMA provide a free confidential wellbeing service to all doctors and medical students. This can be contacted 24 hours a day, seven days a week on 0330 123 1245 or at [www.bma.org.uk/wellbeingsupport](http://www.bma.org.uk/wellbeingsupport). Should you require urgent assistance, neither of these services replace a GP or Occupational Health contact.

Relevant links are provided below

Consensus statement from NIHR, BMA, Wellcome, Royal Colleges etc  
<https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/news/clinical-academics-and-covid-19>  
(Note this is hosted by RCP but applies to all specialties)

HEE

<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Letter%20to%20medical%20academic%20trainees%20and%20medical%20trainees.pdf>

BMA

<https://beta.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/covid-19>

Yours Faithfully,

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Pro Vice Chancellor

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