

## BMA briefing – COVID-19

### About the BMA

The BMA (British Medical Association) is a professional association and trade union representing and negotiating on behalf of all doctors and medical students in the UK. It is a leading voice advocating for outstanding health care and a healthy population. It is an association providing members with excellent individual services and support throughout their lives.

### Key asks:

- Frontline staff must have the proper personal protective equipment. The Government must be clear what doctors can do if they do not have the right equipment.
- The testing of all healthcare workers and their immediate household members needs to be rolled out quickly and to maximum capacity to ensure keyworkers can return to work where possible.
- The Government and NHS leaders should give regular and honest estimates of the speed at which capacity for both tests will grow and be clearer about the relative priority given to key workers.
- The Government must urgently confirm all doctors, including emergency registrants and retired doctors returning to work will receive key contractual protections including Death in Service Benefit and Sick Pay.

### Personal Protective Equipment

- It is essential that frontline staff have the proper personal protective equipment if they are treating patients with COVID-19 or suspected to have COVID-19.
- Doctors are placing themselves at personal risk every day to keep patients and the public safe. Without proper PPE doctors will get sick, and in the worst cases die, as we have sadly already seen. As of 11 April, there were 11 confirmed cases of doctors dying due to COVID-19.
- We have heard harrowing stories from doctors who feel they are being treated as “expendable”, struggling to get hold of adequate or any PPE. In some circumstances, doctors have been forced to source PPE for themselves from hardware stores.
- While the government has been letting us know that protection is on the way, there are still doctors and other NHS staff currently facing the daunting prospect of having to consider treating patients without adequate protection.
- A recent survey of nearly 2,000 of our members found that two thirds of doctors still do not feel safely protected from coronavirus infection where they work.
- Healthcare workers should not, and do not, have to expose themselves to high risk situations without having adequate PPE. **The Government must be clear about what doctors should do if they do not have the right equipment.**

### COVID-19 Testing

- Staff testing is of the utmost importance as it contributes to maximising the number of staff on the frontline and to reassuring key staff with potential symptoms. Without testing, staff are forced away from providing much needed care to potentially isolate unnecessarily, while others may risk spreading an infection to vulnerable patients.



- The Government committed to prioritising the testing of NHS staff weeks ago, however these tests aren't happening fast enough. The testing of staff began to be rolled out on 30 March and as of 2 April, 5,000 keyworkers had been tested.
- In our survey of members, only 195 respondents said they had ready access to tests. 40% of both hospital doctors and GPs said colleagues having to self-isolate because of suspected or confirmed Covid-19 was having a significant impact on capacity to treat patients.
- **The BMA is clear the testing of all healthcare workers and their immediate household members needs to be rolled out quickly and to maximum capacity to ensure keyworkers can return to work where possible.**
- Testing in the UK is currently around 10,000 a day and the Government has committed to reaching a capacity of 100,000 day in the by the end of April. There remains some uncertainty over how this will be delivered or whether those who do not display the symptoms will be able to access testing.
- **The Government and NHS leaders should give regular and honest estimate of the speed at which capacity for both tests will grow and clearer about the relative priority, within this capacity, that should be given to patient and staff testing and the reasons why, including how we adjust these priorities as testing capacity grows.**

### **Workforce: numbers, safeguards and guidance**

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- NHS staff are doing exceptional jobs in extraordinarily difficult circumstances across the country. The Government is taking measures to bolster workforce numbers, which has included calling for recently retired doctors to return to work and registering senior medical students.
- Doctors are putting themselves at risk of significant illness and even death as a result of this disease. Sadly, three doctors have already died in UK, whilst in Italy 50 have died as a result of COVID-19. It is essential that all staff and their families are protected if the worst happens.
- **We are calling on the Government to urgently confirm all doctors, including emergency registrants and those who are not a member of the NHS Pension Scheme (including doctors who have returned to work after retirement), will receive key contractual protections including Death in Service Benefit and Sick Pay.**
- This must include ensuring that locum doctors are able to claim Death in Service benefits and sickness benefits from the NHS pensions scheme regardless of whether their illness or death falls on a non-working day, to increase the number of freelance locums working in the health system.
- Where retired doctors do return to work it must be ensured that those in at risk groups are protected from becoming infected including by allowing them to work remotely.
- To ensure both retired doctors and medical students aren't inhibited from assisting the health service due to a lack of personal and professional indemnity, the Government must work with medical defence organisations to ensure they are personally protected. Medical students must also receive appropriate supervision and should only be requested to work within their competencies.

#### **How you can help:**

To support doctors battling this crisis we ask that you raise the key points outlined in this document with the Government. For further information and support with doing so, please contact [lmiller@bma.org.uk](mailto:lmiller@bma.org.uk)

To assist constituents of yours working in the NHS during this crisis, you can find professional guidance on the [BMA website](#). This includes guidance on [PPE](#), for [retired doctors](#), [ethical issues](#) and much more.