

# Forensic and secure environments committee: report to ARM 2020

Welcome members, to the third forensic and secure environments committee report to the RB.

What a year it has been for the BMA and for FSEC! All of our members are in their third and final year of their committee tenure, representing a wide range of doctors providing healthcare to patients in prisons, youth detention in all of its forms, immigration removal centres, police custody, sexual assault referral centres and forensic psychiatric hospitals. We also represent crematorium medical referees, medical examiners, clinical and medical reviewers.

Despite the global pandemic throwing us all off course, the committee has continued to provide exceptional expertise, advise and has acted on a number of issues that have arisen over the course of the session. It is thanks to them and the support of the secretariat, policy, public affairs and comms teams that we have managed to achieve so much.

## COVID-19, the dying and the detained

The pandemic has brought much into focus for our committee. We have worked tirelessly with a number of other committees (including GPC and PFC) to ensure all guidance for doctors dealing with deaths during the pandemic was accurate, timely and on point. This involved considerable engagement with the DHSC, MOJ, RCGP, the Chief Coroner and other bodies to ensure that there was consistency and clear messaging supporting doctors and the bereaved during the first few challenging weeks and months. The work continues to ensure there is adequate reporting of COVID-19 deaths, especially of those healthcare workers and the expected investigations and inquiries we have and will continue to seek.

We have also sought to raise awareness in how the pandemic has affected prisoners, detainees in immigration, police custody and what effect this has had on healthcare professionals working within these environments. In March, our Chair Alan Mitchell, together with the Chair of our Medical Ethics Committee wrote to the Home Affairs Select Committee outlining a number of concerns regarding the pandemic and its effect on those detained in immigration and other secure environments. We also submitted evidence to the report covering policing under COVID-19. The Home Affairs Committee 4th report: Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 (Coronavirus): institutional accommodation, referenced our evidence and concerns we had raised regarding access to testing for those in IRCs.

## Prisons and the ageing population

Prior to and during COVID-19, we were involved in submitting evidence to the Justice Select Committee specifically on the ageing prison population and the effect COVID-19 will have on this. It is a growing area of concern for the BMA, given prison resources to care and treat for the aging is limited and restricted within the setting. The report published earlier this month referenced the BMA's concerns highlighting our view that in some instances older prisoners would be better cared for in alternative settings. The BMA supported the report's call for the Government to develop a strategy for older prisoners.



## Joint Unions work on prisons safety

At the start of the year, the Joint Unions in Prisons Alliance (JUPA) held a Prison Safety Summit to help develop an effective 'Safe Inside Prison Charter'. The aim of the charter is to outline a more robust and efficient approach to health and safety systems for all workers in prison. HMPPS, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), politicians and providers from education and health, were in all in attendance. Members from JUPA shared personal testimonies about their working environments in prison and ways in which this could be improved. The charter was acknowledged by Prisons Minister, Lucy Frazer, and a meeting has been arranged to further discuss implementation.

FSEC and the Public Affairs team have been working closely with the Shadow Prisons Minister office, to highlight and address issues affecting healthcare in prisons, during Covid-19 such as wellbeing and mental health, effective PPE and testing.

## Crematorium medical referees and the Medical Examiner system reforms

Owing to the ongoing pandemic, plans for implementation of the Medical Examiner system into secondary and primary care has been further delayed. It is yet unknown what the government plan to do with regards to transitioning from the dual cremation/ME system we currently have to the statutory system that was due to be in place this year. We are meeting with the National Medical Examiner shortly to discuss how the implementation will affect primary care. However, given the changes that have taken place during COVID-19, it is yet unclear what exactly the new system will look like and when this will change. We continue to engage with the government and seek updates wherever possible.

This year we also provided some specific advice to our members who work as crematorium medical referees, to support them in their ongoing contractual arrangements with local authorities and sought engagement with the Local Government Association for issues over their fees.

## Virtual events

Given the current climate, our plans to hold a conference in BMA house have been put aside, however we are now looking to hold online sessions for members and the committee are working hard to identify the issue that will be most relevant to our members. Please watch this space.....

**Alan Mitchell**  
Chair, FSEC