

Sir Simon Stevens

Chief Executive
NHS England
NHSE Skipton House
80 London Road
London, SE1 6LH

Sent by email

29 December 2020

Dear Sir Simon,

I write further to my letters dated 03 and 21 December regarding equitable access and prioritisation of the COVID-19 vaccine within the healthcare workforce.

With cases of Covid-19 rocketing and hospitalisation levels higher than in the first peak, healthcare workers are now, as you recognise in your new year message, “in the eye of the storm”. It is, therefore, imperative that frontline staff are protected from the virus so that they can be available to treat patients.

If healthcare workers fall ill from being infected and are unable to work, it will be devastating for the health service at this time of critical pressures and will compound the problems hospitals and GP practices are already struggling with regarding staff shortages. There is also a very real risk of this impeding the roll-out of the vaccine itself, which is reliant on delivery by healthcare staff.

In the BMA’s December survey of doctors in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, around half said that the prevalence of staff on sick leave or self-isolating was having an adverse impact on patient care.

As you are aware, healthcare workers are listed in the same priority group as over 80s in the JCVI guidance. However, we are receiving increasing reports from doctors across the country advising us that they either have not had any notification of access to vaccinations, or that this is being done on a sporadic and ad hoc basis, and without prioritisation.

Prioritisation within the healthcare workforce is also vital if we are to avoid a repeat of the tragic loss of so many lives, with around 90% of those deaths to date amongst doctors from a BAME background. The NHS has a duty of care to its most vulnerable healthcare workers to protect them and this must extend to a duty to vaccinate those healthcare workers who are at greater risk first.

We understand that current stocks of vaccines are limited, but with the realistic hope of further supplies and new vaccines which may be soon approved for use in the NHS, now is the time that we need assurance that frontline staff will be vaccinated in a clearly defined, systematic, and prioritised way.

Chief executive officer: Tom Grinyer

Registered as a Company limited by Guarantee. Registered No. 8848 England.
Registered office: BMA House, Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9JP.
Listed as a Trade Union under the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974.



Your new year message rightly commends the “dedication and the commitment of countless NHS staff”, heralding the “enormous debt of gratitude” owed to them – to this end, I repeat my request for confirmation of what arrangements will be put in place to address these concerns. With doctors and their colleagues “in the eye of the storm”, there can be no delay.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chaand Nagpaul'.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul CBE
BMA council chair