



# Update from the Consortium of Lancashire & Cumbria LMCs

Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020

## Coronavirus (COVID-19) update

The [Prime Minister](#) and CMO announced that the UK has entered the 'rapid spread' stage, and has introduced a number of new measures on [social distancing](#):

- People living with someone with minor symptoms should [self-isolate](#) for 14 days, and living alone to isolate for 7 days.
- People should stop all unnecessary social contact with others
- Avoid all but necessary travel and work from home where possible
- The most vulnerable (those over 70, those with pre-existing conditions, and pregnant women) to practise even stricter social distancing over the next 12 weeks
- The objectives of these measures are to suppress the curve and stop it overwhelming the NHS and protecting the vulnerable.

NHSE/I published its [latest letter of preparedness](#) last week, which outlines the actions that are being taken related to general practice. It includes important areas outlining what routine work can be stopped. The BMA have raised several concerns with NHSE/I, the government and the Health Minister, Jo Churchill.

The BMA have produced [guidance](#) to help support practices on deciding what they should be doing now. Advice is that practices should prioritise the urgent needs of their patients and do so in a safe way that protects the workforce. The NHSE/I letter provides guarantees of payments for 2019/20 QOF which will be based on either 18/19 or 19/20, whichever is greater, and provides similar guarantees for 2020/21. It also highlights a range of areas of routine work that can be stopped. This is just the first step and it is likely that this will need to be extended once it becomes clear how long the current crisis lasts for, including the need for a recovery period.

### **PPE and GP pressures**

The lack of appropriate PPE for primary care providers remains a concern and the BMA are working with NHSE and other stakeholders to get this sorted urgently. Dr Richard Vautrey raised this directly with the health minister and stressed the urgency of getting adequate PPE to practices and giving practitioners confidence that the PPE they receive and use is appropriate. The Minister responded that this was a government priority, that they understood the concerns of healthcare workers and were trying to respond as quickly as possible. This is an issue the BMA will continue to push for a resolution to as a matter of urgency.

In relation to the need for **increased COVID-19 testing and prioritisation for healthcare workers**, there was also agreement with DHSC outlining their commitment to significantly increase the number of tests being carried out in order to help healthcare workers and patients to have the reassurance they need.

Read the BMA statement calling for reliable supply of proper PPE for HCWs [here](#).

Read the updated NHSEI Standard Operating Procedure for General Practice [here](#)





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NHSE/I has also published a letter to NHS about [next steps on NHS response to COVID-19](#) last week. They stated that they would ensure all GP practices in 2020/21 continue to be paid at rates that assume they would have continued to perform at the same levels from the beginning of the outbreak as they had done previously, including for the purposes of QOF, DES and LES payments.

## **COVID-19 prescribing and supply issues**

As set out in the [NHSE/I letter of preparedness](#) (5 March), practices are reminded not to increase the quantities they prescribe but to put patients on electronic repeat dispensing 13x23 day supplies to manage supply issues. A joint statement from the Lancashire & Cumbria Pharmaceutical committees and Lancashire & Cumbria Local Medical Committees will be issued this week.

## **Appraisal and Revalidation**

NHSE has sent out the attached letter, which confirms that any doctors who are due to revalidate before the end of September will have their revalidation date deferred for one year. Appraisals have been suspended until further notice.

## **LMC HR advice to GP Practices as employers**

Please see attached document on specific guidance on the impact of coronavirus on sickness absence and sick pay in the workplace.

## **Online isolation notes - providing proof of coronavirus absence from work**

Online isolation notes via NHS111 online, for patients that are self-isolating, have now been launched. An isolation note can be obtained without contacting a doctor, this will reduce the pressure on GP surgeries and prevent people needing to leave their homes. The notes can be accessed through the [NHS website](#) and [NHS 111 online](#).

## **COVID-19: retired doctors returning to work**

The Government is calling upon health professionals who have recently left clinical practice to help tackle the coronavirus outbreak in the UK. Please see [BMA guidance](#) aimed at doctors who choose to return to work. The [GMC](#) is contacting around 15,000 fully qualified and experienced doctors of good standing with a UK address, who left the register or gave up their licence to practise in the last three years.

## **Serological testing letter**

PHE has sent out the attached letter to a small number of practices whose patients have tested negative for the COVID-19, asking for their assistance in obtaining a further blood sample from patients for serological testing. This is a specific and very limited project in this unprecedented situation and will enable PHE and those they work with to use those who have now recovered to help understand the condition better, develop a vaccine and help us all fight this infection better.

## **Wellbeing**

At times of crisis it is vital that we all look after our emotional as well as physical health. The BMA has a range of [wellbeing services](#) including 24/7 counselling, available to ALL doctors and medical students (not just BMA members) free of charge.





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The LMC also have the GP Support Scheme which is a free and confidential peer support service for all GPs across Lancashire and Cumbria. Please get in touch with [Maria](#) for more information.

The World Health Organisation has also published guidance on [Mental Health and Psychosocial Considerations During COVID-19 Outbreak](#)

[The BMA COVID-19 webpage](#) is updated daily with guidance and links to official information:

- [PHE guidance for primary care](#)
- [NHS England guidance for primary care](#)

The BMA has published [FAQs on your contract terms and conditions](#) which will be updated regularly. Also see the [COVID-19 'update page'](#) with links to BMA priorities, guidance and news.

## PCN DES

Due to the escalating crisis we are facing, GPC England has produced [guidance](#) about what practices can stop and other measures that practices and PCNs can take to focus on managing the current situation. The PCN DES has been changed considerably. It still supports practices to work in PCNs, the funding streams remain guaranteed, but the service specifications have been delayed or can be delayed due to COVID-19 taking priority.

Practices still have until the end of May to confirm their sign up to the DES. NHSE is encouraging practices to do this as early as possible to ensure funding flows and collaborative working arrangements are in place during this extremely challenging period.

With the recent changes the PCN DES Specification is still being finalised but will be released very soon so you will be able to then see the detail of what has changed. The survey which had been planned to ask practices about signing up to the PCN DES and whether it is the right thing to do for the profession at this time will be postponed.

## National data opt-out

Given that the health and social care system will face significant pressures in the coming month due to Covid-19, NHSX and NHS Digital have made the decision to [extend the compliance deadline for the national data opt-out](#) and the final date for submission of the [Data Security and Protection Toolkit \(DSPT\)](#) to 30 September 2020. In addition NHSX has produced some [Covid-19 IG guidance](#)

## Pensions tax annual allowance

NHSE/I have written to all GP contract holders and performers (including Locums). The letter gives eligible clinicians assurance that they can undertake any combination of clinical roles for the NHS during the 2019/20 tax year without suffering any financial loss as a result of the annual allowance pensions tax, subject to using the Scheme Pays mechanism. This includes any additional work related to the response to coronavirus. Read the letter [here](#) and BMA guidance [here](#).

