



Public Health England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

11 May 2020

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Ms Maris Stratulis
National Director
BASW England
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By email: Maris.Stratulis@basw.co.uk

Dear Ms Stratulis

Thank you for your letter dated 4 May and for taking the time to share your feedback. As the professional membership organisation for social work I am particularly grateful for your insight and support to ensure our response to COVID-19 is as robust as possible and would welcome your ongoing engagement with the work PHE is undertaking.

As you will know, PHE is working jointly with the Department for Health and Social Care and key partners such as NHS England and Improvement and the Care Quality Commission in responding to COVID-19 and the issues you raise cut across all the partners mentioned.

DHSC leads on securing the supply of PPE for health and social care and has brought together a PPE Task and Finish group to work through the associated challenges and issues with sector partners. DHSC continues to update advice on the use of PPE the latest information can be found [here](#). DHSC will shortly write to health and social care leaders in local areas outlining plans to step up the support available for care homes as well as the support available in the event of a local PPE shortage.

To support the effective use of PPE, PHE has produced in partnership with sector organisations two additional resources, [How to work safely in care homes](#) and [How to work safely in domiciliary care](#). These resources provide tailored and practical PPE advice to staff working in care homes as well as those caring for people in their own homes. PHE has also produced a specialised training video on donning (putting on) and doffing (taking off) PPE in the care [sector](#). NHS England also wrote on 1st May to every CCG to provide a named contact to help 'train the trainers' in care homes about PHE's recommended approach to infection prevention and control.

I recognise also how important easy-read materials are for those who may need them and you will be aware that PHE has produced a number of easy-read versions of key documents including: General information about Coronavirus (COVID-19), Household isolation, Protecting people most likely to get poorly from coronavirus (shielding guidance) and Mental health and wellbeing. We continue to add to the list of resources available in easy-read. Specific advice in relation to mental health, learning disabilities and autism and COVID-19 can also be found on the NHS England [website](#).

In addition, DHSC has published guidance to support caring for adults with learning disabilities and autistic adults, aimed at [care staff](#) and at [unpaid carers](#). This guidance provides advice on how to communicate the current measures in place and latest guidance to adults with learning disabilities and autistic adults and includes links to easy-read documents as well as other resources.

The Government continues to scale up testing capacity and is committed to mass testing. The Government's overall ambition is to provide enough swab tests for everyone that needs one including continuing to provide tests for patients who need them; and providing tests for NHS, social care and then wider critical key workers and their families who are in self or household isolation, to support them to return to work as soon as possible, if they are well enough to do so. The latest updates in relation to the Government's testing programmes can be found [here](#).

The overwhelming response to the NHS volunteer programme has resulted in over 100,000 tasks being completed to date by volunteers who have signed up to the programme. The programme supports the NHS and social care system, by helping keep some of our most vulnerable safe and well in the community and provide vital support direct to services.

There are four tasks that NHS Volunteer Responders (NHSVR) can currently undertake:

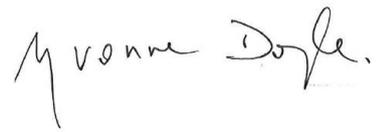
- 'Community Response' – collecting shopping, medication or other essential supplies for someone close to their home
- 'Check-in and Chat' – telephone support to individuals at risk of loneliness as a consequence of self-isolation
- 'Patient Transport Support' – providing transport to take patients home who are medically fit for discharge
- 'NHS and social care Transport Support' - providing transport for equipment, supplies and/or medication between NHS/ social care services and sites. Also involves assisting pharmacies with medication delivery.

In addition to referrals from health and social care staff, the programme has expanded and is now accepting allow self-referrals from vulnerable people who need support, including carers. Further information on the process and eligibility for self-referral is available on the Royal Voluntary Service website at: <https://volunteering.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/nhs-volunteer-responders-portal/isolating>

I share your concern in relation to reports that a higher percentage of health and social care staff from BAME backgrounds have both contracted and died from COVID-19 and like you welcome the PHE review led by Kevin Fenton to analyse people's vulnerability to the virus. This is part of a wider review commissioned by the Secretary of State on disadvantage, due to report at the end of May 2020. There is also a commission by the Chief Medical Officer to NIHR to research in more depth the possible causation of these findings. You may be aware that on the 29 April NHS England wrote to all NHS Trusts, Clinical Commissioning Groups, GPs and community health services advising that on a precautionary basis employers should risk-assess staff at potentially greater risk and make appropriate arrangements accordingly pending the outcomes of the PHE review. We will continue to be guided by the scientific evidence on this matter.

I appreciate just how hard your members are working to deliver essential care to those who need it most and understand that your members will be anxious as they continue to deliver this care. I would welcome your continued engagement with DHSC, PHE, and NHS England and believe the Chief Social Workers for Adults, Mark Harvey and Fran Leddra, are also in regular contact with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yvonne Doyle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'Y' and a distinct 'D'.

Yvonne Doyle CB MD
Medical Director and Director for Health Protection