

19 March 2020

Dear HR colleagues

I wanted to write to you to acknowledge and thank you for all the work you are doing to support the NHS response to COVID-19. The health and wellbeing of our local communities and all colleagues working across health and care is at the very centre of all of our efforts and attention. We are aware that COVID-19 is now an established significant epidemic in the UK and the NHS is under extreme pressure. This pressure will inevitably be exacerbated by staff shortages due to sickness or caring responsibilities. It will be a challenge for all of us.

To alleviate some of this pressure, we are working with Public Health England who are due to publish guidance for healthcare workers imminently. In addition, we are putting in place arrangements for NHS staff to access hotel accommodation through a national procurement programme and for local deployment. I will forward further details on these arrangements soon.

I recognise of course that the COVID-19 pandemic will require significant workforce flexibility and redirection of some resources for the benefit of the patients and colleagues working under significant pressure. It may also be necessary to depart from established procedures in order to mitigate risks and redeploy people to the areas requiring more support. So I would like to reassure you that we are working at pace with NHS Employers to share some very practical guidance for all HRDs which will support in speeding up some HR processes and fill in any gaps. The aim is to publish this guidance this week.

I also appreciate that some of the processes national bodies have in place and require employers to respond in the workforce space may need to be temporarily suspended or postponed. I will therefore be asking the HR network chairs group to advise on what would be helpful in this respect.

Increasing pressure on our healthcare system could cause significant stress and you may have concerns about health and wellbeing of people. As you know, there is evidence that some staff will need additional support months or even years after a particularly traumatic or stressful event. We are developing a national framework where employers will be able to access psychological support for a period of time during and after the COVID-19 virus outbreak. The model would be evidence based in line with the presenting condition and we would be recommending treatment in line with NICE guidelines specific to psychological trauma. You will of course be kept informed of further developments.

Furthermore, in recognition of the current pressures on our services, we have deferred the publication of the full NHS People Plan, along with other national

NHS England and NHS Improvement



planning priorities. However, given the evolving situation, this timeline will be kept under review with the government.

As ever, I would like to thank you for your relentless great work and continued energy and support, particularly throughout these very challenging times.

Best wishes
Prerana

Prerana Issar – NHS Chief People Officer
NHS England and NHS Improvement

E: Prerana.issar@nhs.net | W improvement.nhs.uk / www.england.nhs.uk
Skipton House, 80 London Road, London SE1 6LH