



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

May 2020

## **CORONAVIRUS: “Every Doctor” and “Protect the Front-Line” campaigns**

In replying to calls to protect NHS workers, I would like to state unequivocally that ensuring our frontline staff are properly protected is of paramount importance to me.

The Government committed to testing 100,000 people each day before the end of April. I was delighted that this goal was achieved, thanks to extremely hard work from colleagues throughout the health, social care, and logistics industries, and I pay tribute to those teams for increasing capacity way over and above the initial target since then. This will help end the uncertainty of whether NHS staff need to stay at home. Those who test negative for coronavirus will be able to return to work - enhancing the capacity of the NHS and social care to treat patients and care for those in community settings.

The Government is also working constantly to ensure that all NHS workers who need protective equipment have access to it. A new online portal will allow care providers to order critical PPE, in addition to a 24 hour helpline which already allows providers to request emergency supplies.

I am in no doubt that it is vital NHS staff are well supported for putting their lives at risk and working on the front line at this time. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care announced on 27 April that families of eligible workers who die from coronavirus in the course of their frontline essential work will receive a £60,000 payment, with funding provided to support similar schemes in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This will cover full, part-time or locum NHS and public health workers, including GPs, dentists, retired staff and second and final year students taking up paid frontline roles.

On inquests into the very regrettable coronavirus deaths of NHS healthcare workers, the Chief Coroner Mark Lucraft QC has said that inquests should not address levels of PPE. In his statement he noted that *“an inquest would not be a satisfactory means of deciding whether adequate general policies and arrangements were in place for provision of PPE to healthcare workers”*.

It remains crucial, however, that frontline workers have the essential equipment they need to carry out their incredible lifesaving work safely. The Government has appointed Lord Deighton, former Chief Executive of the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, to expand supply from overseas, improve domestic manufacturing capability and expand and improve the logistics network for delivering to the front line. We



currently have sufficient stock for our Health and Social Care services right across the country, and I am encouraged that Lord Deighton is working to ensure this does not change.

Turning to the question of whistleblowing, I fully support whistle-blowers who play a vital role in ensuring patient safety in the NHS. The Interim NHS People Plan seeks to create a culture where all staff feel they have a voice, control, and influence, including a focus on whistleblowing and the freedom to speak up. The national guardians scheme involves 500 healthcare professionals who are identified by their lanyards alone to show that they are people to whom whistle-blowers can speak both independently and in complete confidence. NHS safety depends on staff looking out for patients, and I know that my colleagues across the Department of Health and Social Care are extremely grateful for the bravery of whistle-blowers in stepping forward.

Finally, I welcome that hotel accommodation is being made available to NHS workers who may be impacted by the 14-day household isolation policy. I am not aware of any plans to expand this but I do appreciate the concerns about vulnerable family members and have fed the point into Health Ministers responsible for such decisions.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'C. B.', with a horizontal line underneath.