

29<sup>th</sup> March 2020



Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
Department of Health and Social Care  
Richmond House  
79 Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2NS

By email: [matt.hancock.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:matt.hancock.mp@parliament.uk) / <https://contactus.dhsc.gov.uk>

Dear Secretary of State,

### **Covid-19 - Health & Social Care Workers**

I am writing to raise the serious concerns we have as a result of Covid-19 affecting health and social care workers. GMB Union, represents members right across the NHS & Ambulance Services and Social Care, both public and private employees.

We understand that these are exceptional times and advice and guidance is changing daily. I can assure you, that the trade unions alongside all of our members are keen to pull together to tackle this crisis the best we can.

However, it is essential that in doing so, we are not putting at risk the health, safety and well-being of this crucial part of the workforce - these key workers who are now being called upon to protect our entire society.

- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

It has been widely reported on the complete lack of suitable PPE for staff right across health and social care. This situation has been exacerbated by the ever changing guidance on what is the correct PPE for what types of staff. Although we appreciate that advice is changing constantly as we learn and understand more about this virus, what has been lacking, is the absolute failure of consistent messaging on this, with evidence and reasons for the changes, to reassure staff that their lives are not being put at risk.

Our members feel let down at a time when they have put themselves on the frontline. GMB has been contacted by Managers in despair at feeling they are putting their staff in harm's way and are unable to do anything to protect them.

I am aware that the Government has now taken back central control of the supply and delivery of PPE. However, supplies are still not arriving where they are needed

most and when they do arrive, they are insufficient in numbers and quality, much of it being years out of date.

Health and safety breaches of this magnitude should not continue to be ignored just because we are in a time of crisis. The health and safety of key workers must remain a priority for the Government and all employers.

1. Can you please advise me of what you are doing to address this crisis within in a crisis?

- **Testing**

GMB has been calling for testing for all health and social care staff and we understand that testing is expected to increase over the coming weeks and will now include staff.

I was advised on a conference call with the Social Partnership Forum that in order to meet the full capacity of testing that it is envisaged we need, the private sector will need to step in and provide the service also.

2. Can you please confirm what you are doing to ensure private healthcare companies are doing this and also that there are no privately incurred fees as a result?

We are already receiving examples of where testing has started within the NHS and the inconsistencies are remarkable. Some NHS trusts are testing all staff that are self-isolating, whereas others are saying that testing is only available for clinicians. There are many vital workers within the NHS and it is imperative that all staff have access to testing should they require it. Whether they are cleaners, porters or nurses - all NHS staff and those outsourced employees providing services to the NHS are vital to ensure the NHS can continue to operate in these unprecedented circumstances.

GMB is seeking clarification on:

3. What guidance is being issued to local NHS trusts and ambulance services regarding the testing of staff?
4. How testing will be rolled out and made available to the social care workforce?

- **Pay**

NHS staff are protected with sick pay should they be required to be off work due to Covid-19. However, that is not the case for everyone that is providing services for the NHS. Although many private contractors operating services within NHS settings are paying Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) from day one, this is not acceptable to the GMB

and our members. Many of these low paid workers who are not being paid their usual pay should they have to self-isolate, are having to decide whether to go in to work sick and against government and medical advice because they cannot afford to lose pay.

GMB is calling on the Government to ensure all employers commit to paying full and normal from day one of sickness during Covid-19.

5. Can you please advise what you are doing to make sure that private contractors operating within NHS settings are adhering to the advice to pay full pay for all NHS staff?

This is also a huge issue in adult social care homes and home care where many are under the control of private companies. The vast majority of whom have said they will pay SSP only. Again, this is putting our members in the unbearable position of having to ignore government and medical advice and put at risk the vulnerable people that they care for daily, as once again they cannot afford to take time off work.

6. What are you doing to ensure these vital key workers, who are predominantly minimum wage earners, are supported financially?

I look forward to your response so that I can reassure our members that they are in fact key workers and that their health, safety and wellbeing is indeed a priority for the Government.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Harrison', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rachel Harrison  
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