

29th March 2020

Mr Anthony Marsh
Chair
Association of Ambulance Chief Executives (AACE)



By email: Anthony.marsh@wmas.nhs.uk

Dear Mr Marsh,

Covid-19 - Ambulance Workers

I am writing to raise serious concerns we have as a result of Covid-19 affecting GMB members employed in all job roles within the ambulance service.

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 key workers 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 in the ambulance service feel let down at a time when they have put themselves on the frontline. GMB has been contacted by Managers within ambulance services who are 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they are needed most and when they do arrive, they are insufficient in numbers and quality, much of it being years out of date.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 our ambulance service workers must remain a priority for yourselves as employers and the Government. We need to ensure that PPE is provided to everyone who needs it and where PPE is not provided, all necessary steps are taken to reduce exposure.

Ambulance crews are also being told when carrying out CPR that FFP3 masks are not required. However, a risk is a risk and we are in unknown territory. Also, most importantly the Resuscitation Council UK (RCUK) are advising you should wear FFP3 for all CPR. They have produced a video with clear instructions - 'do not go near patients without FFP3 and overalls'.

GMB is therefore seeking confirmation of the following:

1. That risk assessments and COSHH assessments as required under health and safety legislation are in place across all ambulance services, or that provision of such assessments or revised assessments can be quickly made by competent persons, for all staff or work areas.
2. That risk assessments and planning includes all staff working on all sites - directly employed, contractors, agency workers, etc.
3. That regular, updated, clear and comprehensible information on work-related risks from COVID-19 are being provided to all workers on an ongoing basis. Clarity of messaging is fundamental as this is not 'business as usual'.
4. That suitable and sufficient Personal Protective Equipment will be provided to workers where exposure risk is identified, and suitable fit testing and training is in place for staff who need to use PPE.
5. How is essential PPE being distributed to the staff that need it?
6. Which staff are receiving PPE and an explanation of how staff have been prioritised to access it? GMB believes that all staff attending potential Covid-19 patients should be equipped with full PPE.
7. GMB is seeking an explanation, transparency of the science and the risk rating used in the making of the guidance being issued by ambulance services on the procedures for CPR and the necessary PPE.

- **Testing**

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

We are already receiving examples of where testing has started 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 ambulance service and it is imperative that all staff have access to testing should they require it, regardless of their job role. All ambulance staff and those outsourced employees providing services are vital to ensure the NHS and ambulance services can continue to operate in these unprecedented circumstances.

8. Can you please confirm what guidance is being issued to local ambulance services regarding the testing of staff?

GMB is keen to provide reassurance to all of its members that both the Union and the employers that we negotiate with are taking all reasonable steps to reduce potential exposure to COVID-19.

I await your response so that I can reassure all of our members working in the ambulance services that their health, safety and wellbeing is of utmost importance and a priority for their employer and 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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Steve Rice
Chair - GMB National Ambulance Committee