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FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



FROM: ROBIN SWANN
Minister of Health

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TO: JENNY PYPER
INTERIM HOCS
ARLENE FOSTER & MICHELLE O'NEILL
FMDFM

**ACTIVATION OF MILITARY AID TO CIVIL AUTHORITY (MACA) REQUESTING
MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

As you are aware, the HSC system is under severe and sustained pressure arising primarily from rising demand due to COVID-19 hospital admissions. As of 13 January there were 809 COVID+ inpatients in hospital across the system and there were 56 COVID+ patients in ICU. Modelling suggests that this situation is to deteriorate over the coming weeks.

At the same time, there are 629 staff absent across the Trusts due to COVID-19, with a further 826 Trust staff recorded as absent due to self-isolation. Of these, there are 494 nurses or midwifery staff absent either due to COVID-19 or self-isolation. These additional staff absences add to the normal absence rates and the significant vacancies across the system, particularly in nursing.

Over recent weeks my Department has been exploring all options to help mitigate the current staffing pressures. Engagement military liaison suggests that Northern Ireland could access a number of Combat Medical Technicians (CMTs) to assist. CMTs are trained to provide basic lifesaving skills and medical support and could be used to support existing nursing staff.

Given the current situation, I am writing to inform you that I have now asked for such support. Failure to do so would be a disservice to our existing HSC staff and to the patients we are all committed to supporting in every way possible. I believe that this

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additional resource would materially increase our resilience in responding to the severe and sustained pressures across the HSC system.

Whilst I have taken the decision there are key final details to be determined and as such it is essential that this information is kept in the strictest confidence. Any breach at this time would risk undermining the level of support that could be forthcoming and would therefore be detrimental to our response to the pandemic. I would therefore ask that you respect the confidence of this letter and I will of course be content to brief you and the Executive at a future meeting.

Personal Data

Robin Swann MLA
Minister of Health

