

**FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH**

From: Robin Swann, MLA  
Minister of Health

5 October 2020

To: First Minister and deputy First Minister



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustle

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Dear *Arlene + Michelle.*

I am writing to seek clarification, as I raised earlier in the light of comments made at today's Executive meeting.

It is clear that there is some dissatisfaction with statements made to the media by the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Adviser in recent days. As I stated this morning, I believe this criticism is unwarranted and unfair. If medical and scientific advisers are doing media interviews, they have to give straight and precise answers to questions.

That, of course, raises the question as to whether the Executive would prefer that they both cease to engage with the media, as I think their professional input would be compromised if they had to act solely as Executive spokespersons. If the latter is the Executive's will, then I believe this space could be better filled by other Ministerial colleagues.

My Department has initiated a weekly media briefing by Zoom by the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Adviser. This has already proved beneficial in terms of clear messaging and managing countless bids for interviews.

The next briefing is scheduled for tomorrow (Tuesday) afternoon.

I would therefore request guidance from you both as to whether these briefings should continue.

In conclusion, I would point out that there has been ongoing commentary around the Executive table about the need to step up communications around Covid-19. As I am sure you will agree, my Department has worked hard to fill that space on this pandemic over several months. It is therefore perplexing that some Executive colleagues appear to be complaining about messaging and also complaining about the messengers.

Personal Data

**Robin Swann MLA**  
**Minister of Health**