

British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin

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The Rt. Hon. Matt Hancock,
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care,
House of Commons,
London,
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr. Hancock,

NHS disbursement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 testing

We are writing to express our grave concerns about the disbursement of PPE and the lack of testing for front line workers by many NHS Trusts.

As you are aware, front line medical staff have the highest risk of contracting COVID-19 because the virus is highly contagious at close contact, and sadly there have already been reports of deaths amongst doctors who have served on the front line. The delay in procuring PPE therefore unnecessarily puts them at risk but we are now hearing from our members that there are trusts who are refusing or are reluctant to give them masks and protective clothing even on request. This is apparently on the back of guidance from Public Health England that PPE should only be given to those staff treating COVID19 positive patients. This is a fundamentally flawed policy because as the Oxford group has shown, the virus is widespread and some patients may present with no or mild symptoms.

Alongside this, the failure or reluctance of trusts and CCGs to test front line staff deemed to be at high risk is lamentable. We have been made aware of employers who pay lip-service to testing, saying publicly that this is of the highest priority and yet they do nothing on the ground to implement the policy.

The coming weeks are going to be crucial to stem the tide of spread and cause serious morbidity and mortality, and we are going to need to safeguard our front line staff so that they can help treat those who present themselves in hospitals. We really have to assume that anyone presenting at the hospital is likely to be affected, and certainly those who have a continuous cough must be assumed to be sero-positive for COVID-19. We are not at all suggesting that this group of staff are precious. Not at all. The fact is that they are key to your strategy to fight the pandemic, and also in the event that they are laid off themselves, then because of their particular skill-set they are hard to replace.

We would urge you therefore to send an urgent instruction to all NHS trusts and CCGs/PCNs that PPE should be made available to all those medical, nursing staff and other front line staff who are treating patients presenting to hospital, most certainly patients with any presentation of cough or fever, regardless of the underlying reason why they arrived at the hospital in the first place, and that those doctors, nurses and other staff who are deemed to be at high risk and their family members will be tested without any failures.

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