

To Rt Hon Matt Hancock, MP
Secretary of State for Health – by e mail

March 25th, 2020

Dear Mr Hancock,

The SOM is the largest nationally recognised professional organisation for individuals with an interest in health and work. We are here to support the NHS in this crisis e.g. we have facilitated clarity on practice and application and linking private occupational health providers and hundreds of professionals to move into the NHS via the NHS Health at Work Network.

Clarity re NHS staff return to work

Currently there is mixed advice to NHS staff with many key staff off work even when they are able to be at work. HR departments are saying staff should be at work to meet the huge demands, when Government guidance is to stay at home. Occupational health care can help with this and therefore needs urgent investment and support.

Immediate investment in Occupational Health

Immediate investment is required in OH including procurement from the OH private sector. We understand there was a proposed investment of £65m in the NHS People Plan to place an occupational health nurse in every NHS Acute trust and all services to meet SEQOHS quality standards. We would like this proposal to be agreed with immediate effect as OH departments are currently overwhelmed with staff queries and request for advice. All acute Trusts should have access to Specialist Occupational Health Physician advice as required by SEQOHS. This would require procurement from private sector providers who have capacity to provide this advice.

Occupational Health care of NHS Staff with Covid-19

We are concerned about Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) availability and current PHE recommendations which do not seem to be science/evidence based. It is not clear which combinations of PPE are most effective in preventing which types of exposure, (to droplets, aerosols, surface contamination), and when should they be used. For example, should surgical masks, filtering respirators or powered respirators be used in specific scenarios or for particular groups of health care professionals.

We fully endorse the guidance provided by HSE in this area and will support the promotion of this to areas where it is not yet reaching. Given the rapidly evolving science and the complexity of risk management that affects deployment of PPE, BOHS stands ready to provide ongoing technical support and guidance to relevant parts of the public sector, including the HSE.

We are happy to meet with your officials to discuss further. The CEO of the SOM, Nick Pahl, can be contacted at 07969279149 or at nick.pahl@som.org.uk

Yours sincerely,

Dr Will Ponsonby President, SOM; Dr Shriti Pattani, Chair, NHS at work network; Dr Noorzaman Rashid, CEO, Chartered Institute of Ergonomics & Human Factors; Diane Romano Woodward Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing; Rob Aitken, CEO IOM; Mr John Dobbie, President BOHS

Cc Simon Stevens, CEO; Professor Chris Whitty, CMO; Prerana Issar, NHS People – by e mail