

19th June 2020

PPE – Face Masks and Coverings

As of this week [face masks and coverings should be worn by all hospital staff and visitors](#) and as reported last week, the BMA have been calling for this to be [extended to all healthcare settings](#), including primary care.

It is imperative that we do all we can to prevent the spread of infection, so that patients and visitors can attend practices without fear of contamination - the wearing of masks by staff and face coverings by the public will play a role in enabling this. With the UK chief medical officers reducing the [COVID-19 alert level](#) from four to three today it is all the more important to do this to avoid a return to greater levels of virus circulation. It will also reduce the risk of a whole team within a practice being required to self-isolate should one member contract COVID-19. Read the BMA statement [here](#).

Practices should be aware of current guidance, which includes:

- Public Health England guidance on the [use of Personal Protective Equipment in primary care](#)
- Further Government advice on [working safely in non-hospital settings](#)

The PHE guidance recommends that those working in reception and communal areas who are unable to social distance, should wear a fluid repellent mask. The BMA believe patients should be encouraged to wear face coverings whenever they attend the practice (with practices continuing to triage patients to keep face-to-face contact to a minimum) and that staff should continue to be enabled to work remotely whenever possible, to create more space for social distancing.

Following the release of government guidance regarding the wearing of face masks in various public settings (including the circumstances where an individual might be exempt), practices are reporting increases in requests from patients for letters of exemption. The [government guidance on exemptions](#)

suggests there is no requirement for evidence for exemption, therefore it should be sufficient for an individual to self-declare this. The responsibility for issuing exemptions is with the transport provider, not GPs – see for example, this information from [First Bus](#) and [Arriva](#). Similarly, practices are under no obligation to provide letters of support for anyone who does not fall under the list of exemptions but considers them to have another reason to be exempted.

BMA Risk Assessment Guidance for Practices

The BMA has updated its [guidance on risk assessments](#) to include two new sections for GP practices. The first section looks at the implications of risk assessments for practices – specifically what impact the adjustments required for high risk staff could have on practices, staff and patients. The mitigation that practices would need to do could include working from home or removal from areas that are considered hazardous, which could lead to a reduction in workforce and in activities that could affect patient safety, or an increased use of locum support and procurement of PPE, at a significant cost. This section also covers a number of suggestions of what commissioners can do to support negatively impacted practices. The second section sets out the risk assessment tools that are available to practices to use. Read the guidance [here](#).

Antibody Testing of Practice Staff

GPC and LMCs are concerned at the significant variation in approaches across the country to the provision of antibody testing for practice staff. This is as a result of the failure of government and NHSE/I to make available an occupational health service to general practice staff. GPC have written to Sir Simon Stevens about this.

Antibody testing for those working in general practice is not mandatory. If those working in general practice wish to have an antibody test, we believe the results should be provided directly to the individual having the test and should not require the involvement of the employer. A local IT solution is being worked on to enable this.

Some healthcare workers have had applications for insurance deferred on the basis of a positive COVID-19 antibody test. The BMA has written to the Association of British Insurers to seek urgent clarification on this issue and have produced [guidance](#) on this.

Shielding

The [Health Service Journal](#) reported that 'shielding' programme for those at highest risk from coronavirus would be dropped at the end of July. We expect an announcement about the government's actual intentions shortly. The LMC

supports the view held by GPC that any changes to shielding guidance should only be made in line with falls in COVID-19 infection rates and with clear information provided by Government to patients and timely information to GP practices.

Pensions Guidance and Update

The BMA has updated its guidance for [GPs about the annual allowance](#), following extensive lobbying, resulting in two important changes that affect the 19/20 and subsequent tax years.

As an emergency measure for 19/20, NHS England and the Welsh Government made a commitment to pay the annual allowance tax charges in full for eligible clinicians in the England and Wales NHS pension schemes. Doctors who were subject to an annual allowance tax charge should use the option of the 'scheme pays' regulations to pay the tax due for 2019/20. From 2020/21 onwards the reduced Tapered Annual Allowance will only affect those with adjusted income of £240,000 and over. Read the full guidance [here](#).

PCN DES

[NHS England](#) has announced that 98 per cent of practices have chosen to participate in the Primary Care Networks (PCN) for 2020/21. With 1,250 PCNs across England this is the same number as last year. The focus for PCNs and practices remain in dealing with COVID-19, but will also now be in expanding the workforce to relieve the workforce pressures for GPs, as the latest [workforce data](#) clearly showed. The DES remains modified including the investment and impact fund (IIF) having been replaced by the PCN support fund until at least October, with funding protected. It is for the PCN to decide how this funding is used.

Regulation of Physician Associates

The GMC has published an update about the regulation of physician associates (PA) and anaesthesia associates (AAs), as new legislation is expected to be introduced in the second half of 2021. Over the next year the GMC will be designing the processes and policies needed to regulate PAs and AAs. Read the full statement on the [GMC website](#).

Worcester Acute Hospital Trust

We want you to know that we continue to escalate your significant concerns regarding a wide variety of issues. It is clear that managing Covid 19 has resulted in a significant shift of work to general practice. The LMC feel strongly that communication from our Acute Trust must be clear and agreed before

going out to general practice. Individual departments should not be communicating directly with GPs.

We hope to have further news soon on recent requests for GPs to triage scan referrals and we continue to make clear where responsibilities lie in terms of ordering and reporting on diagnostics.

Healthchecks and Protection of Income - Worcestershire

The LMC has been in negotiation with public health in order to reach an agreement about maintaining income for NHS Health Checks. We have now reached an agreement which is more favourable than their original offer and which is above and beyond what is being offered in other areas.

In order to support practices during COVID-19 they have agreed to pay practices during 2020/21 and 2021/22 a block payment which reflects activity during 2019/20. In addition, and in order to encourage further activity, the local authority would like to offer payment by results, at their current rate, for any checks completed over and above previous levels of performance. You will be aware that the current contract with practices for NHS Health Checks is due to end in March 2021, therefore they have agreed to extend existing contracts for a further 12 months.

They will be contacting each of their contract holders in the near future to inform them of this development.

The Cameron Fund, The GPs' Own Charity

The Cameron Fund is the only medical charity which solely supports NHS General Practitioners. This includes GP Trainees, working GPs, retired GPs, as well as dependants of GPs.

The Fund helps GPs and their families who are suffering financial hardship, whether through physical or mental ill-health, disability, bereavement or loss of employment.

Financial help is tailored to best support an individual's return to work. As well as grants and loans, the Fund can help with money advice assessments and career coaching for those who may no longer be able to continue to work as a GP. Please find their [poster](#) here for more information.

Contact details:-

info@cameronfund.org.uk Tel. 020 7388 0796 www.cameronfund.org.uk

Nurse Mentor Support

Mentoring support for nurses has now been launched following a successful training session recently. Please see a [flyer](#) for this.

There is also extended local mentoring support in place for members of your practice teams as we navigate the challenges of Covid-19.

Please find a flyer highlighting how you can access peer support during this time [here](#). More information about [wellbeing](#) support can be found on the LMC website.

GP Air and Share

Please see a [flyer](#) for the latest GP Air and Share Event.

GP Support Team –The CCGs and LMC have a well-established GP Support Team in place, whose main focus is to respond to and empower practices to make operational and team changes that directly and indirectly address challenges they are facing in the short to medium term. The GP Support Team can be accessed via the LMC or the Workforce Team sowoccg.workforce@nhs.net.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

The BMA continue to offer [wellbeing services](#) and confidential 24/7 counselling and peer support for all doctors and medical students, as well as their partners and dependents, on 0330 123 1245.

LMC Website

The following guidance has been added to the LMC website www.worcslmc.co.uk this week:

[CCG Air and Share GP Event](#)

[Nurse Mentoring Flyer](#)

[PHE to launch new e-learning on Psychological First Aid during COVID-19](#)

[Cameron Fund Poster](#)

[WAHT Radiology Imaging Requests and walk-in service](#)

Other COVID 19 Resources

[BMJ – news and resources](#)

[RCGP COVID-19 information](#)

[NHSE/I primary care bulletins](#)

[NICE resources](#)

WORCESTERSHIRE AND HEREFORDSHIRE LMC LTD

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All topical issues relating to local general practice are discussed at the monthly LMC meetings and those minutes can be read on the LMC [Website](#). Should you require further information on any issues raised at the LMC meetings please do not hesitate to contact the LMC representative for your area or practice.

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Dr B Fisher

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All 20 practices are represented at Committee Meetings

Worcestershire and Herefordshire GPC Representative: Dr S Parkinson

**THIS NEWSLETTER IS PRODUCED FROM THE LMC OFFICE AT
ST STEPHENS SURGERY**

The next LMC meetings will be:

Worcestershire – 9th July 2020
Herefordshire – 22nd July 2020