

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP

Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

21 March

Dear Prime Minister

Re. COVID19 - Personal Protective Equipment and testing of healthcare workers and household members

We are writing to you as the trade union representing medical professionals working across the UK who are on the frontline looking after patients in the face of the unprecedented demands placed on us by COVID-19.

We have deep concerns regarding the inadequacy of providing necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to the medical profession to enable them to safely treat patients with COVID-19 infection.

Additionally, we are concerned that despite repeated calls to prioritise testing of health care workers, this has yet to happen. This is having a significant impact on workforce capacity, adding additional strain on an NHS trying to attend to its biggest ever challenge.

Doctors from across the UK are exposing themselves to great levels of personal risk in their commitment to treat ill patients with COVID-19. They deserve to be supplied with the right equipment to protect them from infection as they carry out their duty of care to the population.

Unfortunately, we are receiving frequent reports from medical staff working on the frontline that they are not being provided with the correct type or enough PPE. Our doctors need to be sufficiently safeguarded as they battle this pandemic. Doctors are already witnessing their own colleagues falling ill from the virus, as well as instances of some medical colleagues from around the world having died as a result.

Due to this inadequate provision some doctors have told us it makes them feel “*expendable*”. There is also real concern among medical staff that they are at risk of spreading the disease among their patients, family members, friends and wider communities.

The government has repeatedly sought to provide reassurance that adequate supplies of PPE are available centrally for the medical profession – yet this is not the reality of our doctors in GP practices and hospitals across the UK. We have reports of wards running out of facemasks, doctors treating COVID-19 patients without adequate body protection, and in general practice they have been told to purchase further PPE supplies themselves after the initial supply runs out.

We are concerned that the PPE which has been supplied falls short of the requirements [recommended](#) by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and is less adequate than the equipment provided to healthcare staff in other countries.



We seek urgent clarification from Public Health England to explain the apparent discrepancy between the level of PPE recommended in their [Infection prevention and control guidance for pandemic coronavirus guidance](#) and that of the WHO and as is being used in other nations. The lack of adequate PPE is not only adding personal risk to healthcare professionals but also to patients if doctors become infected and are unable to work.

Additionally, we have been calling for healthcare workers and their household members to be tested for suspected COVID-19 as a priority. At the moment significant numbers of NHS staff are self-isolating for up to 14 days not knowing whether they have the virus or not, removing them from frontline duties and leaving their colleagues in ever more stretched working environments. Doctors are increasingly contacting us stating that they want to return to work if they and their household is negative for the virus but cannot do so due to a lack of being tested.

While we recognise your statement at Prime Minister's Questions this week of the importance of prioritising staff for testing, we are deeply disappointed that this has not yet materialised. Every day that goes by is resulting in increased shortages of frontline staff and we call on you to enable this to happen with immediate effect.

Both you and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care have personally committed to supporting medical professionals who are working tirelessly to keep us safe. However, we need stronger action on both PPE and testing to reassure healthcare professionals that ensuring their safety is a top priority for this Government to enable them to do what they are best at – looking after patients at this critical time for our nation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chaand Nagpaul', written over a light blue circular stamp.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul CBE

BMA chair of council