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27th March 2020

Matt Hancock
Secretary of State for Health
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Secretary of State,

RE: CONCERNS FROM RADIOGRAPHY PROFESSIONALS ON THE COVID-19 FRONTLINE

The Society of Radiographers have over 30,000 active, student and retired members across the radiography and medical imaging professions – most of whom are currently working under extreme pressure across the NHS frontline. The vast majority of patients coming through the NHS access medical imaging services and this will be as true during this crisis as it is in more usual times.

In the early days of the crisis, two concerns have dominated the concerns members are raising with us. We wanted to make sure these were shared directly with you so that you can consider these in a way that includes radiographic and medical imaging professionals as well as the default “doctors and nurses”. These concerns are:

- the chronic shortage of the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), in particular masks to protect staff and therefore patients; and
- the shortage of available Covid-19 tests available for staff.

PPE

The shortage of PPE seems to be especially acute in some parts of the country, but concerns are coming to us from all parts of the UK. Our members are hugely frustrated and angry that poor planning has evidently contributed to the increased risk to staff and therefore patients. To be told that there are enough PPE in the system but that these are not in the right places is unacceptable and indefensible – especially given that Government knew this crisis was a looming possibility before the start of this year. PPE for staff should never be an afterthought – the impression of many of our members.

Confidence in your Government's plan to rectify this crisis would improve if you could publically accept responsibility and explain how this is being put right. This has to include explaining comprehensively what is being done to identify other lines of production in the UK as a matter of urgency.

We also want to make sure you are aware that we are advising our members not to carry out procedures without the required PPE in line with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and your own standard guidance. We cannot allow our members to be put at risk and indeed if suitable PPE is not provided infection rates of health service workers will increase leading to a depleted workforce.

All NHS leaders have legal, professional and moral duties to protect the health and well-being of their staff to in turn minimise the risks to patients. This crisis amplifies this duty. Risk assessments are more important now not less and the right equipment doesn't stop being the right equipment just because of logistical failings. We trust and expect that you will publically support this stance.

TESTING SHORTAGES

We also want to raise directly our members' frustration and disappointment that adequate provision for testing for Covid-19 is still not available to our members. We're particularly dismayed by stories of some Trusts and Boards saying that radiographers are not "frontline" and limiting this description to direct medical staff. This is both insulting to our members and deeply counter-productive at this time.

The evidence from elsewhere across the globe is that these tests make a significant difference in limiting the spread of the virus, as well as minimising the risk to health workers and patients. As with PPE, the evidence also suggests Government should have been more prepared and done more to make sure adequate testing arrangements were in place before now. Government statements that they are now working to get this right would have greater resonance with our members if they came with a public acknowledgement of mistakes by not securing adequate testing provision before now.

In making this point, we would stress we are non-partisan and politically independent and do not say this to score any cheap political points. We say it because we know our members value honesty, integrity and trust.

Accordingly, what your Government does now to rectify this needs such honesty. Our members' confidence and morale would grow if such an acknowledgement came with clearer explanation about what is being done to secure higher rates of testing for all NHS staff, including radiographers.

We trust this will be received in the spirit intended and we look forward to a full, positive and honest response that will offer the clarity and reassurance our members want and deserve.

Yours sincerely,



Dean Rogers

DIRECTOR OF INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY & MEMBER RELATIONS