

E: ps/cdo@gov.scot

9 April 2020

Dear Colleague,

My purpose in writing to you is to ask for your personal support in the wider COVID-19 NHS response in Scotland.

You will recall that I wrote to NHS dental practices on the 23 March suspending all routine dentistry and wrote again on the 30 March describing a revised package of NHS support funding. This was largely in recognition of the need to help NHS practices in light of the loss of patient contributions from NHS-fee paying patients.

As a condition of this additional funding support we advised dental contractors that there should be no reduction in workforce. We need to maintain the integrity of the NHS dental workforce throughout this COVID-19 period as you might be required to assist with the wider COVID-19 response across the whole health care system in Scotland.

We have now reached that point. The dental workforce in Scotland is made up of around 3,500 dentists; 5,000 dental care professionals (dental nurses, hygienists and therapists) and around 2,000 administration support staff. The clinical team are all:

- UK regulator (GDC) registered,
- PVG checked,
- Medical emergency trained.

Dentists and the dental team have an invaluable contribution to make in providing support to the wider NHS family at this exceptionally difficult time.

Can I ask that yourself and your team volunteer to support the wider NHS family? Many of you have already done so and I thank you. There are a range of settings described in Annex A, in which you can provide support. Your NHS Board will contact you, if you have offered to help, to match your skills to where they are most needed.

The first step to engaging with this invaluable work is to register your interest in volunteering and I would ask that you do so through the NES website:

<https://www.careers.nhs.scot/coronavirus-covid-19-recruitment/>.

Even if you are already assisting the NHS Board, can you still register with the NES website so we can assess the total contribution made by dental teams. The wider dental support team should also register their interest in volunteering to work on the NES website, so please ensure that the full dental team are made aware of this letter and its content.

By working on behalf of NHS Boards you will be indemnified as any other NHS employee. The skills of the dental team are such that we can make a huge contribution to the NHS effort to manage the challenges posed by COVID-19; this is the time to show our healthcare colleagues that the dental workforce is integral to the NHS family and we are ready to help.

Thank you.



Tom Ferris
Chief Dental Officer

SETTINGS FOR DENTAL TEAMS TO SUPPORT WIDER NHS

Urgent Dental Care Centres

The most obvious clinical setting in which to deploy dental teams are the new urgent dental care centres, which operate in every Board area seven days per week. The centres are managed and staffed by the Public Dental Service and the staffing complemented by 'High St' dental teams.

Community Testing and COVID HUBS & Assessment Centres

There is a pressing need to support our GP colleagues in the community efforts to manage the COVID-19 outbreak in each NHS Board area. We have identified that the experience and training of dentists and dental nurses could be suitably deployed in the COVID HUBS and assessment centres. The dental team is used to examining patients, recording the patient medical history, familiar with the use of PPE, working in a team environment, and with primary and community care workers. The HUBS and assessment centres will be led by an experienced GP clinical-decision maker; dentists and dental nurses could function under that leadership and direction. We are currently piloting this approach in a couple of Board areas.

There is also a potential role for dentists and DCPs in community testing once the programme is finalised.

Supporting vulnerable people with COVID-19

I am discussing the potential to deploy dentists and the dental team from the PDS to support the management of COVID-19 patients in the community. The PDS in ordinary circumstances provide dental care to vulnerable patients often in supported accommodation or in their own home. Their skillset is ideal to bolster the community-response of the primary care team in looking after seriously unwell patients.

Supporting community pharmacy colleagues

Dentists could be deployed in community pharmacies supporting the role of the pharmacists where the usual pharmacy staff complement has been reduced. This work is being discussed with the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer.

Supporting nursing colleagues in hospital & the community

Dental care professionals would be ideal in a complementary role to general nursing, especially as they are used to supporting patients who are anxious and have a detailed understanding of infection prevention and control measures. We are currently working with Chief Nursing Officer Directorate colleagues on a rapid induction programme where DCPs could be deployed as nursing support workers in an outpatient or community environment.

Admin support

The skills of our reception and practice management colleagues will be welcomed in all the settings mentioned.

