
COVID-19 PRIMARY CARE UPDATE – 26TH MARCH

As promised in our letter of 24th March, this document provides an update on the key issues facing Primary Care in the light of the current pandemic. We have attempted to provide relevant information and clarification on issues that colleagues have raised with us, as well as describing elements where we may be able to share best practice across GM.

Management of Excess Deaths

Following recent changes in legislation, a service is being mobilised to increase capacity to support the rising demand to attend, verify and certify expected and unexpected deaths in the community. Phase one will see a bank of GPs deployed into the community to verify and certify expected deaths on behalf of General Practice. As further need arises, the service will also extend to verify and certify the increase in unexpected deaths in the community. Phase one of the service is expected to go live week commencing 30th March 2020.

We plan to issue a detailed communication on this topic on 27th March, prior to the service going live next week. This will include details on relevant processes, flow charts describing the service model and other key information.

Management of COVID-19 in the Community

A working group has been developing GM guidance on this topic, which we are expecting to be signed off on Friday 27th, for issuing as soon as possible thereafter. This work is consistent with relevant national guidance issued last week and builds on the arrangements that many localities have already been putting into place.

We are not seeking to be prescriptive in developing and issuing this guidance, recognising that all localities are already responding to ensure patient and staff safety, aiming to keep as many COVID patients as possible away from acute sites to free up capacity for those who really need it. However, we are keen to ensure that there is equitable community provision across all of our 10 localities to meet the needs of those requiring this care, with the guidance designed to support localities in ensuring that this is the case.

Personal Protective Equipment

We are aware of what a significant issue this is for the whole of Primary Care and you will doubtless have seen the national coverage on this matter over recent days. We are doing all we can to escalate this from a GM perspective and are participating in at calls on this topic on at least a daily basis at the moment.

We understand that deliveries are starting to find their way into Primary Care now and we hope and expect that this will further improve over the coming days. However, the situation is far from resolved which remains a significant cause of concern for us all.

We are conscious that some practices and localities are currently making their own arrangements to source appropriate PPE to facilitate timely and effective treatment of patients and the protection of staff. We regret that this has proved to be necessary but understand why this has had to happen. At the moment, we are exploring potential GM level initiatives in this regard and will provide more information on this tomorrow.

You will doubtless already be aware of the Public Health Guidance on the use of PPE. A link to this guidance is included here for ease of reference.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874411/When to use face mask or FFP3.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874411/When_to_use_face_mask_or_FFP3.pdf)

If you continue to face issues which are not reflective of the above update, then please contact us on the email address at the foot of this document and we will do all we can to quickly respond.

Given the criticality of this matter, we will provide a further update prior to the coming weekend.

Acute Home Visiting Service

One of the suggestions that we have been considering working together on is the development of a model for an Acute Home Visiting Service.

We know that some localities have a such a service in place already, jointly developed with either the local GP federation, Out of Hours service or NWS. Experience from these areas indicates that such a service may support increased resilience in primary care, a reduction in emergency admissions and pertinently for the current situation, may assist in the targeting of PPE equipment to a smaller cohort.

If there is an appetite to do so, we can work to further scope this model with the aim of supporting wider implementation across GM. We would welcome any views on this via the email address below.

IT Roll Out

We are very conscious that General Practice has undergone a massive change in its model of service over the last 7 – 10 days, with practices now conducting the significant majority of patient contacts remotely, often from home, via telephone, on-line or video consultations. This has represented a huge and impressive effort from all concerned.

There has been a significant roll out of IT equipment to support this. Over the last week or so, in excess of 600 laptops have been rolled out across General Practice, with a further 650 or so due to be deployed over the coming days. A further allocation of laptops has been ordered, over and above these numbers, to cope for the next phase of requirements.

To support this next phase of the process, work is taking place to define the remaining demand for laptops (i.e. both clinical and admin teams), with the aim of achieving 100% coverage for remote working.

We are very grateful to the GM Shared Services Team and the local services in Tameside and Glossop and Bolton, who have delivered this roll out process. We recognise that a programme of this scale always presents challenges and issues and we would ask for your continuing patience and support for our IT teams as they continue with this task.

If you have any issues with regard to the roll out of IT to your own practice or PCN, you should liaise with your local CCG in the first instance. Please use the email address below if there are issues you feel need to be raised centrally.

Specific Issues raised by practices which are being progressed

A number of issues or suggestions have been brought to our attention, all of which we are progressing and will provide further updates on via these briefings. The current list of issues includes:

- The potential to set up a central locum (and returners) bank, agreeing standard rates of pay etc
- Consideration of any HR issues needing to be addressed to support practices to enable neighbourhood working, eg Practice Nurses supporting community teams
- DBS issues and any potential for fast track
- Guidance on reimbursement for COVID related activity and arrangements for payment – We are aware that CCGs are issuing local guidance on this matter and this should be the first port of call for any queries.
- NHS Resolution assurances re GPs who are asked to work across organisations in the crisis.
- Guidance for GP providers around sick pay for practice staff
- Consideration of an employee assistance programme for practice staff for counselling and financial advice etc
- Maximising enhanced registrations for nurses to support GP and community teams?

Communications to Professionals and to the Public

We are keen to communicate as effectively and frequently as we can over the course of this pandemic. However, we do recognise that colleagues are receiving significant volumes of email and other communication at present and want to ensure that what we issue is useful, proportionate and avoids duplication wherever possible. Any feedback you have on the relevance and usefulness of these communications would be welcomed and should be sent via the email address below.

As well as ensuring effective two way communication between ourselves and colleagues in Primary Care, we also intend to work on messaging to the general public. Public communication will focus on asking for assistance from the public to act respectfully in accessing care given that primary care is under intense pressure and to be aware of and follow the relevant national advice and instruction being issued.

Should you have any queries with regard to the above or wish to raise any issues in relation to the content, please contact us via the email address: england.primarycarecomms@nhs.net

Dr Tom Tasker
Co-Chair
Joint Commissioning Board

Dr Tracey Vell
Chair
Primary Care Board

March 26th 2020
