

19 March 2020

## **Supporting allied health professionals and allied health professional support workers during the COVID-19 epidemic in the UK**

As we enter unprecedented times in the NHS and wider health and social care services, we wanted to write to you firstly to thank you for the exceptionally hard work you and your staff are doing and secondly to offer you our support.

The World Health Organization has declared the COVID-19 outbreak to be a pandemic, and the Prime Minister has declared that the UK is moving into the delay phase of fighting the virus, which will put the NHS and wider health and care services of all four nations under extreme pressure. This pressure will inevitably be exacerbated by staff shortages due to sickness or caring responsibilities. It will be a challenge, but we are confident that allied health professionals (AHPs) and their support workforce will respond rapidly and professionally. We want to assure colleagues that we recognise this will require temporary changes to practice and that regulators and others will take this into account.

A significant epidemic will require healthcare professionals to be flexible in what they do. It may entail working in unfamiliar circumstances or surroundings or working in clinical areas outside their usual practice for the benefit of patients, individuals and the population as a whole. This can be stressful, and we recognise that you may have concerns about both the professional practicalities and implications of working in such circumstances.

We need to keep to the basic principles of AHP best practice. As registered AHPs, you are expected to follow Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) guidance and use judgement in applying the principles to situations that you may face. However, these also take account of the realities of a very abnormal emergency situation. We want AHPs, in partnership with patients and individuals we care for, to use their professional judgement to assess risk and to make sure people receive safe care, informed by the values and principles in our professional standards of conduct, performance and ethics. A rational approach to varying practice in an emergency is part of that professional response.

It is the responsibility of the organisations in which you work to ensure you are supported to do this. They must bear in mind that clinicians may need to depart, possibly significantly, from established procedures to care for people in the unique and highly challenging but time-bound circumstances of the peak of an epidemic.

We expect employers, educationalists, professional bodies and national NHS organisations to be flexible in terms of their approach and the expectations of routine requirements. Healthcare professional regulators, including the HCPC and GOsC have already committed to take into account factors relevant to the environment in which the professional is working.

Due consideration should and will be given to AHPs and other staff who are using their skills under difficult circumstances due to lack of personnel and overwhelming demand in a major epidemic. This may include working outside an individual's scope of practice. The healthcare regulators have already released a joint statement to explain this: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/registrants/updates/2020/how-we-will-continue-to-regulate-in-light-of-novel->

[coronavirus/](#) and <https://www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/news/joint-statement-covid-19-coronavirus/>

We are also determined to ensure the long-term education of students is not compromised. This will be given appropriate consideration by all the relevant bodies.

Finally, we would like to thank you all for the efforts you are already making. Many AHPs and their support staff across the NHS and public health services have made major contributions to the response to COVID-19. We are very proud of the response of the professions in all areas of practice in their response to this challenge. It has been exemplary. We are confident of the commitment, dedication, professionalism and hard work that the AHP workforce has and will continue to have over the course of this significant pandemic.

Yours sincerely



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