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Dear Colleagues

Supporting the healthcare science workforce throughout the second COVID-19 wave

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented challenge for the NHS and the entire UK population. As the year draws to a close we would like to recognise the incredible skill, resilience and professionalism that has been demonstrated in navigating and responding to these challenging times. As Heads of the Healthcare Science Profession, we thank you for your extraordinary contribution. Your professionalism and effort has never been more vital or more valued.

The healthcare science workforce has been intrinsic to the NHS and public health response to COVID-19 with many examples across the breadth of the profession and too many to mention in detail here. Healthcare scientists have played a critical role in supporting the development and scaling up of COVID-19 testing capacity, both in testing to detect the virus and in antibody testing. Our clinical engineers have been fundamental to the roll out of huge volumes of critical care equipment, ensuring it is fit for purpose and supporting the training of clinical staff in this new equipment. Our bioinformaticians have supported the response to COVID-19 through research and data analysis, which has enabled us to better understand, predict and model the spread and impact of the virus. Across the UK – from acute hospital sites to Nightingale hospitals to testing centres – the healthcare science workforce has utilised its unique scientific and technological skillset to support the NHS and the public during this pandemic.

Unfortunately, as we move into winter, COVID-19 cases have been rising again and there is already sustained additional pressure on parts of the NHS. The pandemic has required staff to be flexible in what they do and to utilise all their skills to support broader multiprofessional teams. Staff will have to continue to work in unfamiliar circumstances or work in clinical areas outside their usual practice. Pressure will inevitably be exacerbated by staff shortages due to sickness, the need to self-isolate or caring responsibilities. Due to the actions of the whole population of all four nations the initial peak of pressure is likely to be significantly lower than it would have been, but it may well be prolonged throughout the winter period, with wide local variation and fluctuation in cases. This will require a sustained and prolonged response from the whole profession; we know this will not be easy for staff, both professionally and personally.

We are working hard to support our healthcare science workforce to continue to respond rapidly and professionally. We know change and uncertainty can be stressful and you may have concerns about both the professional practicalities and implications of working in such circumstances.

While work may look and feel different right now, we must continue to rely on the values and principles set out in our professional standards. Staff should continue to work within their frame of competence but may have to work outside their usual teams, hierarchies and scope of practice. Due consideration will be given to healthcare professionals and other staff who are using their skills under difficult circumstances due to lack of personnel and overwhelming

demand. The healthcare regulators have released a joint statement acknowledging this and setting out how they will carry out their roles during this time.

<https://www.hcpc-uk.org/registrants/updates/2020/how-we-will-continue-to-regulate-inlightof-novel-coronavirus/>

It is the responsibility of employers to ensure that staff working in their organisations are supported to deliver patient care. They must bear in mind that staff may need to depart, possibly significantly, from established procedures and accreditation. Guidance and resources for employers have been collated by the respective countries.

We also recognise the way trainee healthcare scientists and students have stepped up to support the COVID-19 response. We must continue to build on this, ensuring that the contribution of trainee healthcare scientists and students is recognised and their services in supporting the COVID-19 response are further utilised. We are determined to ensure the prospects of trainee healthcare scientists and students are not compromised by this prolonged health crisis. We are working closely with employers, educationalists and professional bodies to enable trainees and students to work and develop in new and different ways and continue to support the healthcare science response to COVID-19.

Finally, we would like to thank you again for the tireless efforts you have and will continue to make. We are proud of each and every one of you for your commitment, determination and dedication. We wish you and your families a happy Christmas and a healthy New Year.



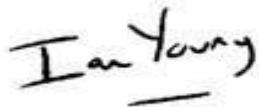
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