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Rebecca Duff

Our Ref: 202000029569  
1 May 2020

Dear Rebecca,

Thank you for your letter of 15 April 2020, regarding a number of concerns raised by members of the Neurological Alliance of Scotland.

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact across all public services. We know that this is a very worrying time and the safety of the Scottish population and the continued provision of the care and treatment is a priority for the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland.

We are taking action in Scotland, aligned to the other UK nations, to respond that will protect the NHS to enable it to provide crucial care to those people that have severe illness as a result of COVID-19 and other life-threatening emergencies. As a result, some scheduled non-urgent procedures have been postponed and services will be delivered differently where possible to minimise physical contact, including the use of video consultations using Near Me software.

I do hear and appreciate, however, the concerns you raise. We have been clear that people's safety remains the utmost priority and NHS Scotland continue to deal with urgent non-COVID related referrals, as well as providing on-going essential care provision. We fully expect people to be treated in line with their clinical priority and for NHS Boards to schedule appointments or advise of alternative arrangements as soon as clinically appropriate. Anyone who feels their condition is deteriorating and they need to be seen sooner should contact their GP who will be able to provide further advice.

I agree that access to appropriate community support remains vital to enable people to manage their conditions and remain in their own homes. We have therefore written to NHS Board Nurse Directors to emphasise this community support should be prioritised and we recognise the critical role specialist nurses have in protecting the most vulnerable in our community.

We have also published guidance for unpaid carers, including advice about the use of personal protective equipment if they are caring for someone that has the highest risk of

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severe illness from COVID-19 and is shielding within their household. Further information is available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-unpaid-carers-providing-personal-care/pages/carers-living-in-the-same-household/>.

In terms of those identified as at the highest risk of severe illness from COVID-19, as you highlight, we have been mindful to advise people to shield themselves only when it is absolutely necessary, as these measures can have a significant impact on their quality of life. I appreciate that those people at increased risk though may wish to strictly follow physical distancing measures including working from home. We are exploring what arrangements could be put in place, if they meet the increased risk criteria, to support people to have these discussions with their employers.

Please find attached a comprehensive reply from Police Scotland in response to your concerns about the handling of breaches of physical distancing rules for people with cognitive impairment. This confirms that Police Scotland has worked with partners to understand concerns and, in consultation, developed additional guidance to assist police officers in their duties. It is also welcoming feedback of policing approaches during this pandemic and encourages you to share the following survey with your members: <https://consult.scotland.police.uk/surveys/your-police-2020-2021>.

We will continue to liaise with you and the wider neurological community to understand what is happening in practice across the country. As you will already be aware, as a member of the National Advisory Committee for Neurological Conditions (NACNC), NACNC remains active and will take account of this intelligence to inform the national and local response to COVID-19 and the recovery of health and social care provision in coming weeks and months. This includes opportunities to progress priorities and actions we have set out in the Framework for Action on Neurological Care and Support in Scotland that will support people from their diagnosis to anticipatory care planning needs.

In addition, I would welcome an opportunity to hear first-hand from you and your experience as a community. In that respect I, would be happy to link in with your executive via a teleconference meeting. If you liaise with my officials we will look to arrange a convenient date and time.

I hope this answers your questions and provides reassurance to people with neurological conditions in Scotland. I wish you and all of your members all the very best at this challenging time.



**Joe FitzPatrick**