



23rd March 2020

Dear all,

As you will appreciate, the spread of Covid-19 presents serious challenges for the NHS and social care and, by extension, for staff and patients. The health and social care workforce, including those who choose to work through recruitment agencies, are our most important asset, and it's vital that trusts are able to find staff as and when they are needed to maintain the quality of care for patients at this time.

We recognise that this increased demand will likely mean an increase in the use of agencies, and we trust that you will work with the NHS and social care providers, in the public interest, to ensure that staff are placed efficiently, are fully compliant, and are proportionately remunerated for the time they are willing to give to the NHS and social care during this period of public need.

While, under normal circumstances, a rise in demand would likely result in a rise in prices for staff, we are encouraging trusts to work in a collegiate way so as not to create excessive competition or negatively impact the ability of the system as a whole to maintain safe staffing levels. I hope that you will cooperate in making this possible, working in partnership with NHS and social care providers at local levels.

To focus attention at this extraordinary time, I wanted to highlight some key areas of heightened concern for NHS and social care providers:

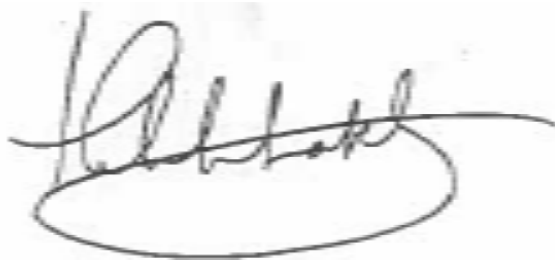
- It is vitally important that agency workers are aware of the coronavirus guidance for NHS and social care staff found on the NHS England website¹, and that you take measures to ensure that workers provided to NHS and social care providers are following government guidance regarding self-isolating. It is imperative that health and social care professionals are not placed in a setting where they might present a risk to patients or other members of staff.
- During a time where illness, and self-isolation, may impact many agency workers, agencies should be mindful of their responsibility to continue to pay statutory sick pay to agency workers, where the agency is the employer.
- Specifically, for the NHS you should continue working in line with the NHS England and NHS Improvement approved frameworks, observing the responsibility to provide a replacement worker in the event of a short term cancellation. This is more important than ever during this time of heightened demand.

¹ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/>

We know that many in the sector are working hard already to find ways to help and recruiters can play a key role at this time. The department has been working closely with industry representatives, including the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC), on constructive measures to ensure that temporary staffing agencies can work with the NHS to support high quality patient care.

The department is also working closely with NHS England & NHS Improvement, framework providers, and representatives of the social care sector on further specific guidance which will be released in the near future.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation at this time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helen Whately', with a large, sweeping underline that loops back under the first part of the signature.

HELEN WHATELY