



By email: hsccom@parliament.uk and BELL@parliament.uk

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chair Health and Social Care Committee
House of Commons
LONDON SW1A 0AA

22 July 2020
Our ref: PN/JH/JB

Dear Chair

At the 21 July oral evidence session of the *Management of the Coronavirus Outbreak* inquiry, you requested I write to the Committee with more information on some statistics I shared from a study conducted jointly by the Crick and UCLH. The study has important findings for those considering whether to prioritise regular COVID-19 testing for health and care staff. The research was published in the Lancet on 9th July 2020 and is attached.

As part of the SAFER study, researchers at University College London Hospitals (UCLH) NHS Foundation Trust, in partnership with the Francis Crick Institute, collect twice-weekly self-administered nose and throat swabs and monthly blood samples from 200 healthcare staff. These staff are caring for patients in a variety of roles within A&E, intensive care, and Covid-19 wards at UCLH.

Swabs are tested at the Crick to assess whether staff are currently infected, and blood serum is tested for antibodies to the virus spike protein, which would indicate previous exposure to the virus. Initial analysis of samples taken between 26 March and 8 April 2020, the peak of the pandemic in London, revealed that around 45% of healthcare staff had caught the virus. 25% were found to have already had the infection when they were first tested, and a further 20% acquired infection within the first month of follow up.

Importantly, 38% of infections were not associated with symptoms within 7 days of the positive swab. For those who did develop symptoms, the average time for this happening was four days from a positive swab test.

I believe that these results demonstrate the importance of regularly testing staff, including those who do not have symptoms, to prevent the spread of coronavirus within healthcare settings. This is the first set of a results from the SAFER study which is a year-long project.

Yours faithfully

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