



Department of Health & Social Care

*From the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

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POC_1249438

The Rt Hon Harriet Harman MP
Chair, JCHR
House of Commons
Westminster
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19 August 2020

Dear Harriet,

Thank you for raising this crucial point about learning from the deaths from COVID-19 and the importance of applying this to our steps moving forwards to help prevent future unnecessary deaths. My Department recognises the essential role of continuous lesson-learning both because of the scale and seriousness of the pandemic but also because COVID-19 is a new disease and the most effective ways of dealing with it are subject to emerging and rapidly developing evidence. We continue to work hard to identify and implement the necessary actions to reduce deaths in future phases.

There is already an extensive legislative and administrative framework in place as well as a detailed system of professional regulation which fulfil our procedural and investigative requirements under Article 2 ECHR.

This includes various independent bodies – not least Parliament - that both secure accountability and enhance lesson-learning for Government policy and decision-making as well as operations. The Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch offers support and guidance to NHS organisations and conducts independent investigations of patient safety concerns in NHS-funded care across England. Death certification ensures that specific deaths are scrutinised by a Medical Examiner or investigated by the Coroner. The principles of openness and honesty ensure that they deal sensitively and compassionately with bereaved families and carers in their investigations and reviews. The Care Quality Commission assesses learning from deaths and can use its powers to take action with individual providers to safeguard patients. The Health and Safety Executive works to prevent workplace death and support compliance with health and safety law.

We have built upon this well-established framework in light of the particular threat posed by COVID-19 to understand transmission and which groups of people are most at risk from this new disease, working closely with scientific colleagues in SAGE and NERVTAG to adapt our response as evidence evolves. We considered WHO recommendations and reviewed international best practice to inform our approach.

The Government identified and implemented a series of measures to reduce deaths. We increased capacity to ensure the NHS was not overwhelmed by creating new Nightingale

hospitals, gained access to 8,000 beds for NHS use through an unprecedented deal with the independent sector and freed up 33,000 beds across NHS hospitals. We increased testing to identify cases and reduce community transmission and over nine million COVID-19 tests have now been processed UK-wide. We set out measures to reduce transmission through social distancing, use of face coverings, and self-isolation, and we have delivered over two billion items of PPE to NHS and social care staff across England. We have protected the clinically most vulnerable through shielding and have set up a Social Care Sector Covid-19 Support Taskforce to help reduce transmission in the sector. We are working to deliver more equal outcomes by taking forward learning from PHE research on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on different communities, including the most deprived.

Work continues apace in the Department and the sector to review the resilience of the health and social care sector and ensure that lessons learned from COVID-19 are built in to deliver an effective response to potential concurrent risks throughout the Winter season. I offer my assurance that the Department and Government remain committed to learning from deaths and adapting our response as we learn more about this new disease.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt". The signature is stylized with a large 'M' and a cursive 'att'.

MATT HANCOCK