



Department of Health & Social Care

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

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The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chair
Health and Social Care Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
London
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16 November 2020

Dear Jeremy

Thank you for your letter of 12 October on the work that the government is doing to support patients who are experiencing the consequences of persistent effects of Covid-19 (Long Covid).

Long Covid presents a significant challenge for our healthcare system and for the Covid-19 patients who suffer from it. I am committed to ensuring that the UK becomes a world leader in Long Covid research, treatment, and care. As I told the House in the debate on 22 October, I visited a Long Covid clinic at University College London Hospital on 7 October with Sir Simon Stevens where I met patients who are now living with Long Covid and I have heard first-hand their experiences.

I have set out information below to address the points you raise in your letter.

Setting up a multi-disciplinary Long Covid taskforce

Dr Nikita Kanani, Medical Director of Primary Care for NHS England and NHS Improvement, has been appointed Chair of the Long Covid Taskforce. It will provide an advisory function to support the delivery of the NHS Long Covid plan (which was announced on 7 October) to ensure a broad collaborative approach to supporting Long Covid sufferers. The Taskforce held its first meeting on 29 October and will meet fortnightly as it develops proposals for the programme of work. It will include Long Covid patients, medical specialists and researchers.

Long Covid clinics and Your COVID Recovery

NHS England and NHS Improvement announced £10 million funding on 7 October that is to be invested this year in designated post-acute Covid-19 clinics available to all patients in England. These will provide physical, cognitive and psychological assessment and diagnosis to those experiencing enduring symptoms so they can be referred to the right specialist help. NHS England and NHS Improvement are looking at where services are currently available to support patients as well as plans to set up new services. These clinics will form one part of a five-part package of measures to boost NHS support for Long

Covid patients. More information on these services and plans will be available in the coming weeks.

This will be complemented by 'Your COVID Recovery', an online tool being developed by University Hospitals Leicester Trust. The tool will offer a series of online modules to support patients to manage, for example, shortness of breath, fatigue, nutrition, sleep and anxiety. Phase 1 is live already and publicly available. Phase 2 will introduce a virtual rehabilitation aspect of the platform and will be launched later in the autumn.

Professional education and developing Long Covid programmes with patients

NHS England has commissioned the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the Royal College of GPs to rapidly develop a clinical case definition and clinical guidance that will help family doctors and other health professionals identify and provide treatment plans for those affected. NICE will be consulting on their guidance shortly to ensure patients, public and others have a chance to contribute and shape the work. This will include patients who have had Covid-19 who may not have had a hospital admission or a previous positive test.

Research into the longer-term effects of the virus in those who did not require hospitalisation

Research into Long Covid for those not hospitalised is of vital importance, as you say. There are a number of research projects either underway or about to become so. The government is supporting three separate research studies with the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR).

The £8.4 million Post-hospitalisation COVID-19 study (PHOSP-COVID) is led by a consortium of leading researchers and clinicians from across the UK, including experts at the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust under the umbrella of the NIHR Leicester Biomedical Research Centre. They are working together to understand and improve long-term health outcomes for patients who have been in hospital with confirmed or suspected covid-19. This will work with 10,000 patients to better understand the condition, refine appropriate treatment and help shape services.

The NIHR and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) have recently announced they will be launching a joint research call in November 2020, with the aim of funding ambitious and comprehensive research into the longer term physical and mental effects of Covid-19 in non-hospitalised individuals. Funded projects will be expected to start in early 2021.

Through the Rapid Response and the Rapid Rolling Calls, the NIHR and UKRI have funded studies that aim to make a significant contribution to the understanding, prevention and management of covid-19, including the causes, symptoms and treatment options for Long Covid. The recent NIHR Recovery and Learning Call will also support research to better understand and manage the health and social care consequences of the global pandemic.

The Government recognises the need for further research into the longer-term effects of the virus in those who did and did not require hospitalisation, and is currently considering options for future work in this area.

Mental health support

The NHS has set out how the Long Covid clinics will designate expert one-stop services in line with an agreed national specification. Post-Covid-19 services will provide joined-up care for physical and mental health, including access to a psychological assessment, to see if someone may be suffering from depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, or another mental health condition. Patients could also then be referred from designated clinics into specialist services or signposted into IAPT and other mental health services.

Workforce

We recognise invaluable service that NHS and social care workforce provided to the nation, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Annex 26 of the NHS staff terms and Conditions of Service Handbook set out the arrangements to support employers and staff in the management of sickness absence, to support staff back into the work place and to managing the risk of premature and unnecessary ill-health retirements. This includes having appropriate systems in place for effective reporting, support, advice and management of sickness absence and work, conducting regular reviews with staff in order to support and monitor those who are sick, making reasonable adjustments and taking early intervention actions, among other measures.

For social care, the Government does not set the levels of pay, or terms and conditions for care workers. We are, however, committed to raising the profile of our social care sector. This government has a strong safety net that helps people who are facing hardship and are unable to support themselves financially. Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) provides a minimum level of income for employees when they are sick or incapable of work. In addition, they may be able to claim Universal Credit and new style Employment and Support Allowance, depending on their personal circumstances.

To support the wellbeing of social care workers, we have worked alongside the NHS and other organisations to develop a package of emotional, psychological and practical resources for the workforce. On 18 September we published a winter plan for Adult Social Care setting out the wellbeing support available to ensure we support the workforce through the winter. The plan also includes a commitment to assess access to occupational health provision across the social care sector.

We recognise the pressures on local services and providers caused by the pandemic, and that is why Government has now made a total of £6.4 billion additional funding available to local authorities during the pandemic.

Support for Self Help UK

The government has made over £300 million funding available through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to support charities directly during the Covid-19 pandemic, together with the furlough scheme and other organisational financial support measures aimed at protecting their reserves.

Meanwhile the government is currently conducting the one-year Spending Review in order to prioritise the response to Covid-19, including giving our vital public services enhanced support to continue to fight the virus alongside delivering first class frontline services. The outcome of the Spending Review will set financial parameters within which we can

determine how best we can support the health and social care system, including our charities, as we develop our understanding of Long Covid.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

MATT HANCOCK