

Written Evidence Submitted by Gama Healthcare (CRV0061)

Introduction

Gama Healthcare is pleased to make this submission of written evidence for the Committee's consideration.

Gama Healthcare designs, manufactures and supplies leading infection prevention and control technologies, and is the primary supplier of disinfectant wipes (Clinell Universal) to the NHS. Its team have also pioneered the development of the Rediroom, the world's first instant isolation room that can be deployed for use to accommodate patients suspected or known to have transmissible infectious diseases within five minutes.

Gama Healthcare was founded in 2004 by two medical doctors, Dr Guy Braverman and Dr Allen Hanouka, with a mission to prevent infections and save lives. In addition to a team of scientists and technologists, the Gama team includes experienced clinicians and internationally-recognised infection prevention and control experts – including a number seconded to the NHS to advise on infection prevention and control and to work in the front line during the initial peak of the pandemic in the UK between March and July 2020 and during the second wave between October 2020 and February 2021.

Gama Healthcare is a founder member of the Safer Disinfectant Network, a collaboration of infection control clinical experts, academics and manufacturers committed to promoting best practice and campaigning for UK regulatory regimes to prevent products from making misleading or inaccurate efficacy claims that could put the public at risk.

Written evidence

- What role can technology, research and innovation play in supporting the UK's economic recovery from Covid-19 and how can it best be supported in this?

Surface cleaning and disinfection has been fundamental to reducing the risk of coronavirus transmission, complementing public health guidance on hand hygiene and social distancing. It is likely these enhanced practices will remain in place for the foreseeable future, both to mitigate the continued risk of coronavirus and as a consequence of lasting behaviour change during the course of the pandemic.

Research and innovation has been fundamental to the development of disinfectant products capable of providing protection against viruses and pathogens, thereby mitigating risk and in the medium to long term supporting the resumption of business operations to enable economic recovery. Government can support this research and innovation and protect consumers through strict regulatory requirements with appropriate enforcement when misleading or inaccurate efficacy claims are made. This also recognises the investment and innovation undertaken by many manufacturers.

The pandemic has resulted in the inevitable and exponential expansion of the disinfectant market. However, the current UK regulatory regime and enforcement is light touch by international comparisons including the US, Canada and Australia. Consequently, it is possible for products to have misleading or inaccurate statement about their efficacy against viruses and pathogens, including the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19. These include providing protection against coronavirus for up to one year. Such a situation undermines the research, investment and innovation of reputable manufacturers; and increases the risk of virus transmission at a time of economic recovery. Improved regulation of products would mitigate these risks and should include the requirement for products to be able to demonstrate their efficacy through independent testing in a laboratory accredited for that specific test.

Innovation can also support NHS capacity and patient flows, such as through the provision of temporary and rapidly deployable isolation facilities like Gama Healthcare's Rediroom. The pandemic has required a significant percentage of the NHS estate to be dedicated to coronavirus management and segregation due to the highly contagious nature of the virus. This has compounded the impact of the pandemic by creating restrictions on the use of the current NHS estate, particularly in acute settings, for patients with other conditions – meaning treatments and consultations for urgent and life-threatening conditions have been delayed or cancelled. Such capacity also prevents cross-contamination between patients and reduces the risk of staff exposure.

Greater adoption of such innovation within the NHS would provide increased resilience to bed and examination room capacity; thereby mitigating the risk urgently needed healthcare interventions being delayed, which can affect health outcomes and impact workforce productivity that is much needed to deliver economic recovery.

- Does the current or post-Covid situation lead to any particular opportunities or challenges for economic growth driven by technology, research and innovation?

As outlined above, the pandemic has resulted in an exponential growth of the infection control sector, with a considerable number of new products with questionable efficacy claims coming to market.

Technical and specific standard tests exist to demonstrate the effectiveness of disinfectant products against a range of viruses and pathogens, including coronavirus. Reputable manufacturers utilise these tests to ensure product efficacy, not only acting in accordance with best practice but providing assurance of effectiveness for end-users whether these be public sector settings, businesses or members of the public.

However, market growth comes with considerable risk and has brought into focus the weaknesses of UK regulatory regimes for disinfectant products. Consequently, it is possible for disinfectant products to make inaccurate or misleading efficacy claims – including against coronavirus – which are not substantiated by independent testing in a laboratory accredited for the specific test.

Despite the effectiveness of the vaccination programme and public messaging regarding hand hygiene, there will be an unnecessarily high risk of virus transmission if the disinfectant products used to clean and sanitise surfaces and commonly touched objects are not up to the task. Whilst the vaccination programme is in progress, this raises the risk of members of the workforce having to self-isolate and of business resumption and recovery being hampered, which will affect economic recovery.

This pandemic has highlighted the need to prioritise research and innovation to support infection prevention and control in preparation for the next one. This specifically should include the strengthening regulation of disinfectant products and requiring them to be subject to independent testing in an accredited laboratory before claims of efficacy are made. This will mitigate the risk of infection transmission, protect the public and support increased productivity. It will also incentivise product research and innovation so that products are required to demonstrate their efficacy and that users are assured, not reassured of efficacy.

- What lessons can be learnt from the role of technology, research and innovation in recoveries from previous economic downturns, and how relevant are these to the current situation?
- How have research and innovation in UK universities, business and other settings been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and how might they be affected by any lasting changes post Covid-19?
- How effective have measures adopted by the Government to support research and innovation, such as the support packages for innovative firms and university researchers, and the 'Ministerial University Research and Knowledge Sustainability Taskforce,' been?
- In the context of the Government's 'Research and Development Roadmap,' what shorter-term measures can best support UK research and innovation in recovering from the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic and adapting to the post-Covid environment?

(March 2021)