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ELGC COV 32

Ymchwiliad i COVID-19 a'i effaith

Inquiry into COVID-19 and its impact

Ymateb gan: Y Gymdeithas Feddygol Brydeinig

Response from: British Medical Association

Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff

25 June 2020

Inquiry into COVID-19 and its impact on matters relating to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's remit

BMA Cymru Wales response

BMA Cymru Wales is pleased to provide a response to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's inquiry into the Covid-19 outbreak in Wales.

In addition to submitting a response to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's consultation, we felt it was important to make sure the views of BMA Cymru Wales members were made clear to the Communities, Equalities and Local Government Committee due to the disproportionate impact that Covid-19 is having on BAME communities and BAME healthcare workers.

The evidence that BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) people are disproportionately likely to contract Covid-19, and to suffer severely and to die from the virus, is now overwhelmingly clear. This can be demonstrated by the fact that more than 90 per cent of all doctors and consultants who have tragically lost their lives in the UK have been from BAME communities.

This evidence leaves little doubt about the disproportionate effect of Covid-19 on these groups and BMA Cymru Wales therefore called early on for this to be investigated further by Welsh Government.

We were therefore pleased when Welsh Government announced their review into how and why BAME communities are disproportionately impacted by the virus.

Cyiarwyddwr Cenedlaethol (Cymru)/National director (Wales):

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This was followed up by BMA Cymru Wales calling for Welsh Government to introduce a risk-profiling framework to be used by employers as part of an individual risk assessment to ensure all doctors are protected from working in roles that could increase their chances of Covid-19 related ill-health or death.

While all doctors want to do the best they can for their patients and, in doing so, accept that they may at times be expected to accept a degree of risk in providing treatment in a pandemic, they should not be expected to give the ultimate sacrifice of their lives.

It is therefore crucial that employers identify all workers in high risk groups and take appropriate mitigating measures.

Whilst it is essential to protect BAME workers, it is important that risk assessments cover all colleagues. Many older doctors choosing to return to the frontline also fall into the higher risk categories. It should be noted that the risk of poor outcomes triples for each decade of age for everyone. There are opportunities for these doctors to assist NHS Wales during this time of pressure with their experience and expertise without seeing patients on a face-to-face basis. Instead they can triage patients and carry out consultations via video and telephone consultations.

Such opportunities, where appropriate, should be offered and made available to BAME doctors as well so that they are kept safe while still being able to contribute to fighting the virus and assisting their NHS Wales colleagues.

Following our calls for a risk assessment, on 26th May 2020 Welsh Government announced their Risk Assessment for all healthcare workers.

The Risk Assessment will take a two stage approach:

1. Each staff member will have an assessment taking into consideration their individual characteristics and health conditions.
2. Following this, a discussion will be held with their line manager about any specific actions that can be taken to protect the staff member.

Due to this being the early stages of the Risk Assessment, BMA Cymru Wales has, and will continue, to feedback to Welsh Government to ensure that the risk assessment results are recorded, the impact is monitored and, if necessary, the scoring amended.

It is crucial that all healthcare workers, in particular those from BAME backgrounds, are appropriately protected taking into consideration their individual health needs and characterises. In doing so, this must be applied appropriately and reasonably by all managers working in all health boards across Wales.

Finally, it is important to note that lessons must be learned from potential unconscious biases that many BAME doctors have felt to have been held towards them which, in many cases, has led to them not being able to voice concerns about PPE or working practices. This is clearly

unacceptable, and Welsh Employers must ensure that these doctors are fully supported in coming forward and speaking out.

If the committee requires any additional information to assist with its inquiry, BMA Cymru Wales will work to assist the committee.