Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

09 April 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

Mental Health/Psychological First Aid for staff across NHS, Social Care & Frontline Settings

*We write as a group of cross-party MPs and Peers in conjunction with the All Party Parliamentary Health and All Party Parliamentary Psychology Groups, regarding the urgent importance of supporting the mental health/psychological first aid of Key Workers across NHS, Social Care and other frontline services at this critical time.*

Key workers in our NHS, social care and frontline settings are facing an unprecedented situation.

They face huge physical demands, in terms of long hours, intense work and a risk of infection, as well as the huge psychological demands of managing anxiety and psychological distress from patients, caring for those at the end of their lives and supporting families coping with bereavement.

As this crisis continues, we urge you to hold the physical and psychological needs of frontline staff in mind and to value both needs with parity. This is a marathon, not a sprint, and it will be important to consider how psychological needs may vary between individuals, between geographical areas, in different healthcare settings and at different phases of the response.

We welcome the initial news that there will be a national plan to support the psychological wellbeing of NHS staff, starting with a mental health hotline.

The British Psychological Society (BPS) has issued guidance for healthcare leaders and managers on proactive steps to protect the psychological wellbeing of staff during and after the coronavirus outbreak.
We call for this comprehensive plan for NHS staff, and for it to be extended to Social Care and other frontline staff coping with trauma, and request that it be developed in line with this best practice guidance as follows:

1. First, at an organisational level, to see all basic physical and mental health needs being supported (for example adequate PPE, access to food and drink, protected places to rest and recharge).

2. Second, at management level, to see visible, inspiring organizational leadership supported by Government (e.g. looking after staff, supplying information, demonstrating compassion).

3. Third, at the individual level, peer support mechanisms, access to psychological first aid and of course the ability to escalate urgently to formal psychological interventions, where required.

Over the coming months we expect psychological needs to grow significantly as people deal with anxiety, loss, trauma and burnout.

What we do now, the support we offer and how we manage this crisis, will have implications for the NHS, its workforce, frontline services and the general public for years to come.

Let’s work together to protect our NHS, Social Care and other frontline staff's psychological wellbeing at this crucial time.

We look forward to your urgent response.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Lisa Cameron MP
Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Groups for Health and Psychology