

19 November 2020

Dear colleagues

Supporting nurses and midwives throughout the second COVID-19 wave

COVID-19 has been a challenge for the entire UK population but frontline clinicians have been particularly affected. Thank you for your remarkable past, present and future work to reduce the impact of this crisis on the lives of our fellow citizens. You were a testament to our professions during the first wave and we know you have been working tirelessly to improve COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 care since.

Unfortunately, as we all know, COVID-19 cases are rising again and there is already sustained additional pressure on parts of the NHS and other elements of care provision. These pressures will inevitably be exacerbated by staff shortages due to sickness or caring responsibilities. As a result of the actions taken by the whole population across all four nations the initial peak of pressure will be significantly lower than it would have been. However, it may well be prolonged throughout the winter period, with local variation and fluctuation in cases, requiring a sustained and prolonged response.

We all need to support one another during this time. It has been and will continue to be difficult, but mutual support makes this prolonged crisis easier to manage personally as well as professionally. As leaders for our professions we, as chief nursing officers (CNOs), remain committed to supporting you during these difficult and uncertain times. There are health and wellbeing initiatives in place if you need them, and we continue to work with Government and our colleagues in the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and professional bodies to ensure that the voices and needs of nurses and midwives are heard.

We are confident nurses and midwives will respond rapidly and professionally, and we want to assure colleagues that we recognise this will once again require temporary changes in practice, and to provide reassurance that regulators and others will take this into account.

This second wave will require all healthcare professionals to be flexible in what they do. For nurses, this may include working outside their normal role or place of work. The healthcare regulators have already released a [joint statement](#) to explain this.

We recognise how stressful this can be and that our professional communities may have concerns about both the professional practicalities and implications of working in such circumstances. We are committed to ensuring you feel supported during these changes and able to discuss and raise concerns where appropriate.

We must continue to adhere to the core principles of nursing and midwifery practice. As registered professionals we should always practise in line with the NMC code and use our professional judgement, taking account of the realities of an abnormal emergency situation. The NMC Code is here to support us and, even in the most difficult of circumstances, is a valuable tool to help guide practice supported by the latest [Caring with Confidence animations](#).

We want nurses and midwives, in partnership with patients and people they provide care for, to use their professional judgement to assess risk and make sure people receive safe care, informed by the values and principles set out in their professional standards. It is the responsibility of the organisations in which we work to ensure we are supported to do this. They must bear in mind that clinicians may need to depart, possibly significantly, from established procedures to care for patients in the highly challenging but time-bound circumstances of the peak of a pandemic.

We expect employers, educational supervisors, professional bodies, national NHS and health and social care organisations to be flexible in their approach and the expectations of routine requirements. Healthcare professional regulators, including the NMC, remain committed to taking into account factors relevant to the environment in which the professional is working.

We committed at the outset of the pandemic to ensuring any emergency measures would not unduly affect the ability of nursing and midwifery students to complete their training and while we have seen unprecedented pressure on services, we will continue to support students to successfully complete their programmes on time. We therefore support the NMC's intention to maintain the supernumerary status for students, and thank you for supporting them in practice.

It is more important now than ever that we continue to maintain the high standards the public expect of us and we expect of each other. This includes following government guidelines and our professional code.

Finally, thank you again. We are very proud of the response of the nursing and midwifery professions and nursing support staff to this challenge, and we hope you are as well. It has been truly exemplary and inspiring.

Yours sincerely



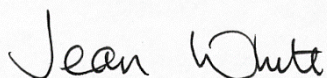
Ruth May
Chief Nursing Officer England



Charlotte McArdle
Chief Nursing Officer
Northern Ireland



Fiona McQueen
Chief Nursing Officer
Scotland



Jean White
Chief Nursing Officer, Wales



Andrea Sutcliffe
Chief Executive and Registrar, NMC