



NEWS

Seven days in medicine: 18-24 March

Covid-19

NHS strikes major deal with private hospitals to boost capacity

The NHS in England will benefit from an extra 8000 beds, almost 1200 more ventilators, and nearly 20 000 extra healthcare staff from this week to aid the fight against coronavirus, after NHS England reached agreement with independent hospitals to use their staff and capacity. Under the agreement the private sector will reallocate almost all of its national hospital capacity at the same time to the NHS. The private sector would be reimbursed “at cost,” meaning no profit would be made for doing so, said NHS England.

UK government bans parallel export of “crucial” drugs

The Department of Health and Social Care banned the parallel export out of the UK for more than 80 drugs commonly used to treat patients in NHS intensive care units. The action, a standard measure to manage potential drug shortages, will cover medicines such as adrenaline, insulin, paracetamol, and morphine. The measure is designed to ensure an “uninterrupted supply” of drugs for NHS hospitals treating patients with covid-19 and to prevent companies buying drugs meant for UK patients and selling them on for a higher price in another country.

Chancellor pledges £2.9bn to boost care for most vulnerable

The UK government pledged £2.9bn to protect and support the most vulnerable people in society and free up at least 15 000 hospital beds. The funding, announced by the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, in last week’s budget, will see £1.6bn go to local authorities to help boost the adult social care workforce and aid services helping the most vulnerable people, including homeless people. The remaining £1.3bn will be allocated to help improve NHS discharge processes so that patients who no longer need urgent treatment can return home safely and quickly.

Surgeons issue joint guidance to protect doctors and dentists

The British Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons and ENT UK issued joint guidance to protect dentists and doctors seeing patients who may have been infected with covid-19 but don’t know it. The guidance highlighted evidence from China, Italy, and the UK showing the risk to doctors and dentists who have to put their faces close to those of their patients to treat them. It calls on members of both organisations to protect themselves with FFP3 masks.

UK launches whole genome sequence alliance to map spread of virus

The UK government has provided £20m to help clinicians and scientists use whole genome sequencing to map how covid-19 spreads and behaves. A consortium made up of the NHS, public health agencies, the Wellcome Sanger Institute, and numerous academics will draw on the funding to look for breakthroughs that help the UK respond to this and future pandemics. Samples from patients with confirmed cases of covid-19 will be sent to a network of sequencing centres that currently includes Belfast, Birmingham, Cambridge, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Norwich, Nottingham, Oxford, and Sheffield.

GMC warns doctors not to profit from people’s fears

The UK General Medical Council reminded doctors of their responsibilities not to profit from people’s fears about the virus, after the *Sunday Times* reported that a doctor who runs a clinic in Harley Street, London, made a £1.7m profit selling £2.5m worth of tests for covid-19 in less than a week.¹ A GMC spokesperson said, “We would be concerned to learn that doctors are exploiting patients’ vulnerability or lack of medical knowledge, in order to profit from the fear and uncertainty caused by the pandemic.”

Help NHS staff get supplies, royal college urges supermarkets

The Royal College of Physicians urged supermarket chains to put in place extra measures to ensure that NHS and social care staff can access essential supplies. Several supermarkets changed their normal practice to ensure that older people and the most vulnerable in society could access goods, amid wide-scale panic buying. The college’s president, Andrew Goddard, called for similar measures for NHS and care staff: “Several NHS staff have told us that they are finding it challenging to buy food. We will really appreciate it if you are able to put in place additional measures.”

GP indemnity

UK gets new scheme for historical clinical negligence claims

The government published legislation to establish its Existing Liabilities Scheme for General Practice as the move to state backed GP indemnity draws closer. From 6 April clinical negligence cover will be provided for current and former GP members of medical defence organisations that have reached agreement with the Department of Health and Social Care.

Initially the scheme will apply only to GP members of the Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland. It will apply to GP members of the Medical Protection Society from 1 April 2021. The department has not yet reached agreement with the Medical Defence Union.

Coroner inquests

Doctors fear being criticised, survey indicates

A Medical Defence Union poll showed that UK doctors are concerned about the implications of attending a coroner's inquest. The survey of 253 doctors found that almost three quarters (73%) were worried about the possibility of being criticised at a coroner's or a procurator fiscal's investigation, while 61% were unsure whether to inform the General Medical Council if they were criticised. Some 72% were apprehensive about media reporting on an inquest, while only 23% would feel prepared if called to an inquest.

Research news

Regular tub bathing is linked to lower risk of cardiovascular death

Bathing regularly in a bathtub is associated with a lower risk of death from heart disease and stroke, indicates a long term study published in *Heart*. And a daily hot bath was seemingly more protective than bathing once or twice a week, the findings indicated. A research team from the University of Osaka drew on participants in a population based tracking study of more than 61 000 people in Japan aged 45 to 59 years.

Infections still responsible for a fifth of child deaths in England and Wales

An analysis published in the *Archives of Disease in Childhood* found that infections were still responsible for one in five deaths of children in England and Wales, with respiratory infections the most common known cause. The UK researchers used electronic death registrations for England and Wales between 2013 and 2015, covering children aged 28 days up to 15 years. They noted that their findings came despite sharp declines in overall childhood death rates over the past decade, helped in part by the rollout of new vaccination programmes.

Fitness to practise

MPTS adjourns hearings until July

The UK Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service has adjourned new fitness-to-practise hearings until July, to release the doctors who sit on the three person panels to help fight the covid-19 pandemic. The service will continue with review hearings on sanctions imposed earlier and will continue to impose interim restrictions where deemed necessary, pending a full hearing. Reviews and decisions on interim restrictions will be heard using Skype for Business or will be considered on the papers by a legally qualified chair, without a hearing. A small number of the service's 145 medical members will continue in decision making roles.

1 Exposed: the doctor who got £2.5m in a week. *Times*, Mar 2020. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/exposed-the-doctor-who-got-2-5m-in-a-week-from-coronavirus-tests-78hd6wqfv>.

Published by the BMJ Publishing Group Limited. For permission to use (where not already granted under a licence) please go to <http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions>