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Beauty services firm backtracks on NHS staff ban

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Benefit Cosmetics has reversed a policy to ban NHS workers who had treated covid-19 patients from using its services, after a backlash on social media.

On 14 April the consultant cardiologist Lynn Miller shared on Twitter images of a comment on Facebook from nurse Rachel Kate and a response from Benefit Cosmetics.¹ Miller's tweet said, "I hope none of my NHS colleagues were hoping to go to a Benefit brow bar now restrictions have eased, because they're refusing to take clients who work for the NHS in case they've been working with patients with covid. There is such a thing as PPE [personal protective equipment]."

The company's brow bars offer cosmetic eyebrow services such as waxing and dying.

In her comment to Benefit Cosmetics on Facebook Kate said, "Shame on your staff [for] turning away NHS staff on the basis that NHS staff work with covid patients. Please educate your staff that NHS staff do lateral flow tests and wear PPE and therefore are probably safer than the average Joe Blogg off the street!"

In its response Benefit Cosmetics said its policy was that any customers who had come into contact with someone suspected of having covid or its symptoms would be refused service. The company said, "The last thing we want to do is refuse any of our customers and their appointments either on our counters or our brow bars, and whilst we completely appreciate the position this puts you and your fellow key workers in, it has to be our policy for the time being and it has to be a blanket policy that is consistent for all Benefit customers."

However, in a statement published on Twitter on 15 April the company apologised and said that it had amended the policy.² It said, "We never meant to exclude anyone, especially not our incredible NHS staff and key workers. Thank you for your feedback, we've listened and we've amended our policy, which was reissued today. We're sorry we got it so wrong. We deeply regret all the upset that has been caused."

The company said it would now ask customers three screening questions when they arrived for an appointment at one of its brow bars: have you, or members of your household, had covid or covid symptoms in the past 10 days; have you been in close contact with anyone who has covid or covid symptoms in the past 10 days; and were you wearing medical grade PPE at the time?

Despite the policy change NHS staff continued to express disappointment on Twitter. Newcastle GP Samuel Parker tweeted, "Embarrassing lack of awareness on the vital role performed by the overwhelmed and underappreciated NHS and social care staff."³

The BMJ contacted Benefit Cosmetics for a comment but received no response.

1 Miller L. Twitter. 14 Apr 2021. <https://twitter.com/LynnGreigMiller/status/1382398828637253641>.

2 Benefit Cosmetics UK. Twitter. 15 Apr 2021. <https://twitter.com/BenefitUK/status/1382745337643814913>

3 Parker S. Twitter. 15 Apr 2021. https://twitter.com/Dr_S_Parker/status/1382674579311722497.

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