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| To All Staff at Oxford Health. | Chief Executive’s Office  Trust Headquarters  Warneford Hospital  Warneford Lane  Headington  Oxford  OX3 7JX  tel: 01865 902769  [www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk](http://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk) |

5th June 2020

Dear [ ]

**Thank you**

We want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your extraordinary and amazing efforts over the last three months. You have risen magnificently to the challenges posed by the virus and have shown great courage facing the multiple uncertainties in care and treatment, patient and personal safety, when our knowledge about Covid-19 has been incomplete and developing rapidly. It has called for great steadfastness when strict infection control procedures have required us to work separated from our wider communities of support – in hospitals and at home. This period has brought out inspiring examples of adaptability and innovation in every part of the Trust.

Some of you have been infected, others seen their loved ones fall ill. You have vulnerable relatives, children to look after, and those near you have faced the restrictions on daily life. They have lived with the stresses and strains entailed by working for the NHS in this highly challenging environment. Families have made sacrifices; the support they have given to enable you to keep the NHS going has been vital. We thank them for that too.

We have faced Covid-19 for nearly three months now. But if the initial peak of cases is now gradually beginning to decline, we are entering a new and different phase, bringing its own risks and challenges. We must be very careful to avoid any recurrence of the virus spreading rapidly. We are writing to you now to let you know about how the Trust is adapting to a world in which Covid-19 remains very much present, while something like ‘normality’ is restored. We want to explain what we are doing to try to ensure your own and your patients’ safety, and how we can best continue to support each other. This next phase may go on for quite a long period of time, and we will need to find a way to operate as normally as possible while still taking a comprehensive range of extraordinary measures to protect against the virus and to minimise the possibility of any further resurgence. This will be a marathon, not a sprint.

**Safety at work**

Throughout the pandemic we have done our best to follow, in some instances to stay ahead of, the national advice being given by the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England and Public Health England on how best to protect ourselves, our patients, and the general public. This has involved the widespread adoption of PPE, strict hand hygiene, infection prevention and control measures, social distancing and home working. Thank you for all the support you have given to putting these measures into effect. The transformation has been extraordinary: for example, the percentage of consultations undertaken remotely rather than face to face has increased from 14% in early March to 57% in early May. It’s you who have put these into effect and we thank you.

We have now learnt from experience internationally how important it is to reinforce general safety measures with action specific to individuals, especially where the evidence points to greater risk of serious illness after infection. We know, from the data produced by Public Health England, that being from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background, having underlying health conditions, including obesity, age and gender are all factors which will have to be considered in individual risk assessments.

In the background are the facts of inequality. We know that BAME communities are experiencing a greater impact from the pandemic because of a range of long-standing factors which relate to inequality. We recognise and acknowledge the deep concern in BAME communities - and amongst BAME health workers in particular - about the strikingly high impact of Covid-19 related complications and deaths they have experienced. We share that concern and take it very seriously. We want to assure you that a great deal of thought has been given to how we address it holistically and respond as a Trust.

With the support and participation of Trades Unions and Trust Equality Network colleagues, we are putting in place measures to address these very important issues. However long the NHS operates with Covid-19 present, everyone should have the opportunity to understand the risks which their role at work might bring, and, in the light of their personal circumstances, be able to discuss options to mitigate those risks in a way which allows them safely to continue in it, wherever that is possible.

**Risk screening**

We have developed a risk screening tool for all staff, irrespective of role or where they work, drawing on the best examples from across the NHS. It is available online at [https://ohft365.sharepoint.com/sites/ipc/sitepages/what’s-your-covid-19-risk.aspx](https://ohft365.sharepoint.com/sites/ipc/sitepages/what's-your-covid-19-risk.aspx) but is also available in a paper format for those who prefer that. Paper copies can be obtained by contacting [Occupational Health](mailto:Occupational.health@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk), telephone 01865 902504. The health details you give by filling out the screening tool will be kept confidential and used by Occupational Health to identify where there is a need for a further discussion relating to any higher health risks from Covid-19. You will not be asked to give specific details about any health conditions you may have.

So far around 4000 colleagues have already completed the screening tool. If you have not yet, we strongly encourage you to do so. We really want to make sure that all staff, especially those who are in high-risk groups, such as people of BAME heritage, can participate in screening. We are asking managers to ensure that everybody has the chance to take part. If your personal circumstances change – for example in relation to a vulnerable relative or your own health, or a change in your role – then you can re-do the screening tool at any time to make sure that your information is kept up to date.

**Risk assessments**

The risk screening tool is used to identify those people whose individual circumstances suggest that there is the need for a more detailed discussion with their line manager about the options available for a more personalised approach to risk mitigation in the workplace, and to give people the confidence that they know where to turn for help and support. The discussion with your manager doesn’t need you to specify what your health problems are, only that a higher level of risk from contracting Covid-19 means that it is important that there should be a discussion about what measures can be put in place to keep you safe. People are also concerned to protect family members who may be vulnerable, and the risk assessment will take account of that too. While many staff are willing to discuss their circumstances in confidence with their line manager, who knows them and their role well, some people may not wish to do this. If this is a concern for you, you can ask your manager to refer you for an assessment by the Occupational Health team instead.

We appreciate that in general people are keen to continue to work with their colleagues and to stay with their teams. It is very important that this is an individualised and supportive discussion, looking at a range of options, not blanket rules which dictate whether people need to move to another environment or to home working. Many options are available in the workplace (though we will still have to operate within the overall parameters of national guidelines, they offer some degree of flexibility to enable us respond to risk), but one of the most important outcomes of this exercise is that where people have concerns they feel able to raise them, and know where to turn to for help.

This process will need to be carefully conducted and so it will not be completed overnight. We will be using the risk screening tool to prioritise where to start. Nor will it be a one-off exercise; we will need to build on it as individual circumstances change and as we learn more about Covid-19 and how best to manage it.

Remember that if you do feel concerned about any issues in relation to your own or your patients’ or your colleagues’ safety, and feel that you can’t speak to your line manager or professional head, then you can contact the Trust’s Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, Caroline Griffiths at [freedomtospeakup@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk](mailto:freedomtospeakup@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk) or on 07876 546075. There are also Fair Treatment at Work Facilitators who can be contacted by emailing [FairTreatmentatWork@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk](mailto:FairTreatmentatWork@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk).

**Returning to ‘business as usual’ with Covid-19**

The conditions of the ‘lockdown’ are now gradually being relaxed across the country. The NHS is preparing to meet health needs that may not have been addressed during the emergency. However we will not be able to revert to all pre-Covid-19 working arrangements. We must remain highly vigilant in order to avoid renewed growth in infection rates, and we should also expect there to be other consequences arising from the period of lockdown, not least additional demand for mental health services.

Because the virus is still present in the community we must continue to maintain strict infection prevention and control and social distancing measures in all our services and across all of our sites, from the ward to the staff rest room. Wherever appropriate, we will continue to run services remotely and to maintain home working where people do not need to come into the workplace to do their jobs. That will help reduce the risk of spread and will also create some more space to enable social distancing for colleagues and members of the public who do need to attend our sites.

We are conducting a systematic survey of all Trust sites to establish where additional action is needed to introduce signposting, one-way systems, physical barriers and redesignation of space as services resume. If you are working from home, please continue to do so until any new arrangements are confirmed for your team. For wards and clinical and support services teams who must be physically present at Trust bases or in the community this exercise will support the process of risk screening and individual assessment. We can expect these arrangements to be in place for some time to come, but we will keep them under review and will keep you updated as they change.

**Testing**

The Trust has been active in providing viral (polymerise chain reaction -PCR - swab) testing from early in the pandemic. This test identifies whether a person currently has the virus. Across local health and care systems, so far over 2000 staff or their family members, with symptoms of Covid-19 have been referred to this service, and approximately 34% of those tested positive. The regional and national testing arrangements have now significantly improved their capacity and turnaround time, and so the Trust team will now be focussing on priority groups who otherwise might have difficulty accessing testing. Staff who are symptomatic can access PCR swab testing through the national coronavirus testing service <https://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test-essential-workers>.

We are also participating in a clinical trial led by colleagues at Oxford University Hospitals, open to all staff whether they are symptomatic or not, which will give access to an antibody test alongside a viral test. An antibody test can tell someone whether they have had the virus in the past, by analysing a blood sample. Most people will have detectable antibodies about 7 to 14 days after Covid-19 symptoms start. They usually stay in the blood after the infection goes away, but it is not yet known for how long. In addition, it is not yet known whether the presence of antibodies protects that individual from future infections, nor whether they can then transmit the virus to others. Even with a positive antibody test, you must continue to protect yourself and others with PPE and infection prevention and control measures as before. Normal social distancing measures must also still apply – especially when not wearing PPE, for example in meeting or rest rooms.

Used in conjunction with PCR swab testing, this trial will help us to better manage the risk of the virus spreading where people may not be showing obvious symptoms, as well as helping us to provide answers to some of these key questions in search of more effective prevention and treatment. Resources will be available through the Trust’s intranet  site (<https://ohft365.sharepoint.com/sites/YourTrust/SitePages/Coronavirus-briefing.aspx>) to help managers set up and run local clinics for their staff. Where that is not possible additional support will be offered by the trust’s ‘wrap around testing team’ to facilitate this within your service. It is our aim to enable all staff in the Trust to have the opportunity to participate in this testing process by the middle of July. If you would like to have an antibody test please inform your line manager.

If you are sick from Covid-19, or you are contacted by the national ‘Test and Trace’ team, it is very important that you follow national guidance regarding self-isolation and let your manager know. We want to reassure you that being ill from Covid-19 or isolated as a result of contact-tracing will not affect your job role or future progress.

**Resting**

We are in this for the long haul, and so we must pace ourselves. For the past three months people have been working flat out. Even if options for holidaying away from home are limited, please take a break, take some leave and have a rest. Here’s a reminder of some of the support that’s available:

* Oxford Health Employee Assistance Programme – Freephone 0800 0305182 Username: Oxford, Password: NHS
* The OHFT Wellbeing Team [wellbeing@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk](mailto:wellbeing@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk)
* Our NHS people - staff support line (free) 0300 131 7000, 7.00am – 11.00pm, 7days a week
* Text FRONTLINE to 85258 for support 24/7
* Occupational Health – 01865 902504
* Advice/access to free NHS Apps via the health and wellbeing COVID-19 page. Ask your manager to print off paper copies for you if you are unable to access these

Working through this time has been an extraordinary experience and for some of us has been at times very difficult. But Covid-19 has brought out the best in the NHS. I - Stuart Bell - shall retire as Chief Executive in just over a week’s time, and there has been no greater privilege in my entire 38-year career in the NHS than to serve with you through the last three months.

Yours sincerely,

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| **David Walker**  **Chair** | **Stuart Bell CBE**  **Chief Executive** |