

Educational guidance for doctors returning to the primary care workforce during the Covid-19 pandemic

The purpose of this document is to help you think about the best way of preparing yourself for clinical work in primary care over the next few weeks, and to keep yourself up-to-date and be able to deliver your best.

1. Our duty to provide a good standard of practice and care

In “Duties of a doctor”, the GMC has set out clear guidance about the professionalism with which doctors should approach their work. Specifically, they state:

- You must be competent in all aspects of your work.
- You must keep your professional knowledge and skills up to date.
- You must regularly take part in activities that maintain and develop your competence and performance.
- You should be willing to find and take part in structured support opportunities offered by your employer or contracting body (for example, mentoring). You should do this when you join an organisation and whenever your role changes significantly throughout your career.
- You must recognise and work within the limits of your competence.

This is all about the importance of patients receiving the best care – which is probably the main motivation for your wanting to join and support the primary care workforce at this time. To meet these requirements – and achieve your overall aim of patients receiving the best care – there are several steps that you should now take, and this document describes these in more detail.

2. Thinking about the exact role that you will be doing

Most doctors about to return to primary care work will be doing:

- Telephone consultations, either of cases triaged to be likely Covid-19 patients, or general GP work.
- Some will be doing face-to-face GP work, either in surgeries, Covid-19 hubs or OOH
- Some will be doing “back office” work either in the surgery or remotely – dealing with prescriptions, laboratory results, hospital communications (e.g. letters and discharge summaries), medication reviews

It is important that you clearly understand which of these tasks you will be doing, so that you can work out which skills, if any, need some updating. We have below listed some educational resources to help you in updating your skills, but this list is not exhaustive. If during the next few weeks your type of work changes, then you should go through this process once again –

1. Clarify the type of work you are being asked to do
2. Identify the skills and knowledge that you will need
3. Work out which of your skills or areas of knowledge need updating
4. Identify and use appropriate educational resources or help from colleagues to remedy these areas

3. Suggested tools for identifying learning needs

You may be unsure about exactly which areas of clinical knowledge you need to refresh. Certainly having a good understanding of the symptoms, signs, progression and treatment of the Covid-19 illness will be important, but it is important to remember that patients you speak to with fever may well have tonsillitis, otitis media, bacterial pneumonia, pyelonephritis, cellulitis, meningitis, encephalitis etc. rather than Covid-19. Obviously if you are working in a setting where you are helping with non-Covid-19 patients, you may need to be familiar with almost any area of primary care – and in this scenario the GMC’s advice about only working within the limits of your competence are that much more pertinent.

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You may want to complete the **RCGP's Self Test**

(<https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/course/index.php?categoryid=56>): this is an open-book on-line test (available free to returning GPs during the Coronavirus crisis) that you can complete at your own pace at home, covering a wide range of GP-relevant topics, and after completing this you will have a report on the areas with lower scores where you should consider focusing your updating.

The RCGP also has other ways of you testing your own knowledge in their Essential Knowledge Challenges (EKC), linked to their Essential Knowledge Updates (EKU) programme.

4. Some educational resources

Some recommended educational resources:

Fourteen Fish has a wide range of educational resources in its GP Library. It is free to register with Fourteen Fish, and as a GP returner you have free access www.fourteenfish.com/join/nireturners

RCGP: During this time of national crisis, until 30 June 2020 the RCGP are making their entire eLearning content freely available to support all returning GPs and primary healthcare professionals.

<https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/>

NB Medical (<https://www.nbmedical.com/>) and **Red Whale** (<https://www.gp-update.co.uk/>) are hugely popular commercial providers of excellent GP learning resources available for a charge, although some of these are available free of charge.

NICE: You can find a list of NICE Guidance relating to Covid-19:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/published?type=cov,coa>

If any question of your work bringing you into direct contact with patients, you should make sure that you are familiar with the guidance on the use of **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control>

5. Seek out someone to support you in practice (a "buddy")

It may well be a number of years since you were on the receiving end of a supportive mentoring relationship at work, and you might feel that this will not be necessary, but it is worth considering. You can also contact NIMDTA for support.

The **British Medical Association (BMA)** has confidential 24/7 counselling and peer support services open to all doctors and medical students on 0330 123 1245, where there is always someone you can talk to.

<https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/your-wellbeing/wellbeing-support-services/counselling-and-peer-support-for-doctors-and-medical-students>

6. Record and reflect on your progress

As you go through the next few weeks you will learn a great deal, and we would encourage you to log your learning. However, this needs to be a process that helps you – not a chore, or something that makes you feel bad if you're not doing it!

So, for educational modules that you complete, try to identify key learning points and what you are going to incorporate into your practice. For memorable patient encounters (both the good and the challenging) try to think what you have learned – perhaps record just one every few days.

Dr Louise Sands

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