

Chief Executive Officer
Richard Evans OBE

Direct line: 020 7740 7209
Facsimile: 020 7740 7233
E-mail: DearR@sor.org

Our ref: DR/va/



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Matt Hancock
Secretary of State for Health
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Minister

On the 27th March I wrote to you regarding the concerns of members of the Society of Radiographers, requesting a degree of honesty and transparency about the chronic shortage of the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the shortage of available Covid-19 tests available for staff.

It is disappointing that we find it necessary to write again to re-emphasise the points in our previous letter. We represent over 30,000 active members, right across the cancer treatment and medical imaging professions – most of whom are currently working under extreme pressure at the NHS frontline. Too often, including at points during the crisis they are overlooked by the default reference to “doctors and nurses”. The vast majority of patients coming through the NHS access medical imaging services and this is as true during this crisis as it is in more usual times.

In March, when stating that there were sufficient PPE supplies but that these supplies were just in the wrong place, you misled the clinical community and the wider public. There have been attempts to justify such lies as being politically expedient – the need to reassure the nation being prioritised over the truth. When writing to you previously we warned that this was a dangerous strategy, particularly when it is essential your Government retains the confidence and trust of the staff on the frontline through a prolonged campaign against this virus. Such lies are corrosive and make it difficult to believe anything you or your officials say to reassure our members as the campaign continues.

Last weekend was a new low for our members. With our members still missing vital PPE to protect themselves, patients and their wider communities, any pretence of blurring the truth to protect national morale was missing from the cynical moves to:

- Water down the HSE guidance for staff, as seen by the re-classification of Covid-19
- Divert blame onto staff deemed to be using too much PPE
- Attempting to divide staff and differentiate between parts of the “frontline”, inferring that some health professionals (e.g. ICU nurses) are more worthy than others (e.g. radiographers)
- Encourage staff to recycle single use PPE, without adequate testing or evidence that this was safe
- Tell health professionals to make do with the PPE they had even if it’s not meeting normal standards because something must be better than nothing.

Trust and confidence in leadership is important, especially in challenging times. Honesty and integrity are core requirements in leadership. Our members understand that and expect to be able to trust us and their national leaders. This spin and lies have corroded our members' trust in your Government's leadership during this crisis.

References to the "frontline" have obvious military overtones. Armed forces personnel sign-up knowing there is a chance they could risk their lives whilst our members sign-up to save lives, most never thinking they could be asked, let alone expected, to risk their own. However, the "frontline" reference has appropriate resonance in the current crisis where health professionals are indeed putting their lives at risk in the greater service of citizens.

We do not believe that a Defence Minister would ever be allowed knowingly to send soldiers into a battle zone without the appropriate protective clothing leading to unnecessary, additional injuries and likely fatalities during the height of a military campaign, let alone announce that this was the intention in advance. Doing so would shatter any pretence of protecting national morale. The impact on the troops would also be recognised as self-defeating. If this ever happened there would inevitably be calls for a full Public Inquiry and almost certainly legal challenges from victims' families. Yet this is the exact position in which you and your senior officials have put our members with minimum acknowledgement. We write to tell you to prepare for the same outcomes.

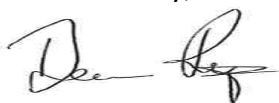
We also reaffirm this simple message. We will never compromise our members' safety and so you can be certain we will continue to support any of our members who refuse to work without the appropriate PPE, as identified in credible health and safety risk assessments.

The SoR, along with other AHP unions and professional associations have also been working tirelessly through the crisis to support initiatives such as the Nightingale Hospitals; supporting returnees and students to join the Temporary Register; and contributing to negotiations around the industrial and employee relations agenda to maximise flexibility. We will continue to do so, knowing that the leadership we have been providing is valued by our members as well as Health leaders. However, we have credibility in these discussions because we represent and retain the support of our membership. Therefore, we will never compromise on the most basic of principles – it is never in our members', our profession's or our national interest to do so.

Therefore, we expect these concerns to be received and acknowledged. We expect the spin to stop and hope a more honest approach can re-establish the trust and help facilitate some honest reflection when the appropriate Inquiries open in the future. In doing so we will be properly honouring all of our NHS "frontline".

We look forward to your response,

Yours sincerely,



Dean Rogers

DIRECTOR OF INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY & MEMBER RELATIONS