

Christina McKelvie MSP
Minister for Older People and Equalities

By email

10 June 2020

Dear Minister,

As you know, pharmacy staff are making a vital contribution to the NHS response during COVID-19 and are showing extraordinary dedication to supporting patient care.

The Public Health England report on 'Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19' recognised that people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Pharmacy teams and service users are understandably concerned by these findings.

Whilst initial analysis from Public Health Scotland didn't appear to indicate people from ethnic minority groups were disproportionately affected by the disease, these were preliminary findings based on limited data. At the time of writing, four pharmacy team members have died with COVID-19. Three of them from BAME backgrounds. This has caused great sadness in the profession, as well as questions about how teams can be protected. It is essential that there is a thorough analysis of the situation in Scotland and that robust data is collected to enable this.

We welcome the announcement that an Expert Reference Group will be established to assess the impact of COVID-19 on ethnic minority communities and the Scottish Government's commitment to work with individuals and organisations within communities to protect lives in this pandemic. With 43% of registered pharmacists from a BAME community, we would urge you to engage with the pharmacy profession to bring about real change to support and protect our workforce.

The past few weeks have highlighted the longstanding issue of discrimination experienced by people from BAME backgrounds, in the UK as well as around the world. COVID-19 has also shone a spotlight on the urgent need to tackle the health inequalities facing certain communities. These are collective challenges that need leadership at the highest levels and not something that any one community can fix by itself.

There are also wider questions about how we encourage inclusion and diversity across the health service, promoting equality of opportunity, and supporting people from more diverse backgrounds into NHS leadership roles. The RPS has been working on an Inclusion and Diversity strategy which will be launching soon, and we will make sure to share a copy of this with you.

As we begin to look at how the health service will need to adapt in future, it is vital that all pharmacy teams are included in support for the workforce to deliver frontline care safely. With continued pressure on staff and the need to boost retention whilst coping with the challenges and anxieties of COVID-19, this should include funding for occupational health for all pharmacy colleagues delivering NHS services.



As a profession we are often overlooked and not included in policy decisions, however, as the third largest health profession, we have a vast array of experience and knowledge to share. We want to ensure that pharmacy is included in these discussions, so that the workforce is supported to continue looking after all our communities across the country.

Yours sincerely,



Jonathan Burton MBE, FRPharmS
Chair, RPS Scotland



Elsy Campos
President, UK Black Pharmacists Association

cc: Jeane Freeman MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport
Rose Marie Parr, Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for Scotland