

To all GPs

Chairman of the General Practitioners Committee

Our Ref: GPC/LB/CF/sl

7 July 2009

Dear Colleague

Pandemic flu – issues for GPs

As you know, last week the H1N1v flu pandemic moved from the containment phase to that of outbreak management. The English CMO has written to all GPs – a copy of that letter can be viewed at www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Lettersandcirculars/Dearcolleagueletters/DH_102025. Similar letters and updates have been sent by the CMOs of the devolved administrations:

- [CMO letter for Northern Ireland](#)
- [CMO letter for Scotland](#)
- [CMO updates for Wales](#)

The revised joint BMA/RCGP/DH guidance will be available shortly on the BMA website.

We are very aware that this outbreak is creating additional work for GPs and their staff and considerable additional work in the flu hot spots, particularly Birmingham, London and Glasgow. GPs' response to this challenge has been admirable, demonstrating all that is good about general practice, as GPs strive to do their utmost for their patients. On behalf of the General Practitioners Committee, I would like to offer our thanks to GPs and practice staff. We are extremely proud of your professionalism and efforts to deal with the situation as effectively as possible.

It is likely that the outbreak will spread widely in the coming months and much of the work of diagnosing and treating those infected with the virus will fall to GPs. We are confident that you will continue to rise to this challenge and that patients can continue to look to their GP practice for the best possible care in extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

Contract implications

The move to a treatment phase, which has changed the way GPs are responding to the outbreak, has not yet triggered the need for emergency arrangements for general practice to ensure continuity of practice income. We are working closely with the Health Departments and NHS Employers to finalise the arrangements for deciding when and how a revised SFE should be introduced to suspend normal working and enable income protection to come into effect.

The original agreement envisaged that the income protection would be triggered on a country-wide basis. However, the pandemic has not developed as evenly through the country as expected. In our discussions with the Health Departments and NHSE, we are exploring urgently the possibility of suspending elements of the contract on a PCO by PCO basis, controlled by regional health authorities and supervised nationally. I

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am sure you can see that such arrangements are necessarily complex and designed to be fair to practices and deliverable by the NHS. We have a definite undertaking that GPs will not lose income as a result of working with the local NHS during a pandemic.

We are urging the Departments to ensure that PMS/Section 17c practices are similarly supported.

GP locums

We are working to ensure that locum GPs who are contracted to work for a PCO during the pandemic will be protected. For example, we are committed to ensuring that locum GPs will receive a fair rate of pay, as well as being entitled to injury benefits, and for their dependants to be entitled to death in service benefits. Interim advice on death in service benefits can be found on the BMA website at www.bma.org.uk/health_promotion_ethics/influenza/panflugp/fluforlocumGPs.jsp. As our discussions with the Health Departments progress, we will be providing further information and updates on all these points.

Updates

Detailed information for GPs on flu is available on the BMA's website GP pages www.bma.org.uk/health_promotion_ethics/influenza/panflugp/index.jsp. We urge GPs to continue to ensure that they keep abreast of developments as the situation is changing rapidly.

Yours sincerely



DR LAURENCE BUCKMAN