

30th April 2020

Robin Swann MLA
Minister for Health
Department of Health
Castle Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
Northern Ireland BT4 3SQ

Dear Mr Swann,

As you will know, a death in service benefit for NHS staff, similar to the scheme that is in place for the families of our military, is currently being considered by your government. This is in recognition that this dreadful virus is cutting short the lives of so many who are fulfilling their duty and vocation even though the risks are high to themselves and their families.

In both England and Wales, the respective Health Ministers (after some initial uncertainty) have already made clear that all pharmacists providing NHS services to patients, to include those working in the community pharmacy setting who are putting their lives on the line in the fight against COVID19 should not need to have the added worry that their families will have to face the added financial stress if they die in the line of duty. They have all been included in the newly announced NHS death in service benefits scheme.

The PDA is the largest organisation representing employee and locum pharmacists across all sectors; hospital, community and primary care with 31,000 members across the whole of the UK. Those members working in hospitals and directly employed by the NHS will be confident that your scheme will cover them. However, our members who are doing equally important work especially in community pharmacy may well be less certain. Pharmacists, whether as locums or employed by the private sector pharmacy contractors, are working on the front line in a greater way than ever before. As more GP surgeries close their doors to walk in patients and are largely taking pre-screened bookings only, the pharmacy has become the front line on this war on the Coronavirus in the community. Community pharmacies across Northern Ireland have seen an increase in patient visits many of whom will still present with symptoms of COVID19, creating much more face to face exposure and risk of contracting the virus.

We are already aware that 3 members of our pharmacy family have died as a result of COVID19, 2 of whom worked in community pharmacy. Community pharmacists deserve to know that they are valued and recognised by the government in Northern Ireland as much as their colleagues directly employed by the NHS.

We understand that you are currently considering representations from various healthcare unions and we would ask that you consider our request to include all patient facing pharmacists, to include those in community pharmacy in your scheme. Community pharmacy activity is 95-98% funded by the NHS, so it would be very difficult to understand how at a time when community pharmacists and their teams are facing some of the most difficult and risk laden working environments in memory if community pharmacists and their teams were not supported by the NHS death in service benefits scheme.

We understand that you and your officials will be announcing the details of the scheme for Northern Ireland in coming days and we look forward for the reassurance that whether or not they are directly employed by the NHS, the lives of community pharmacists and their teams are valued to the same extent as other important members of the NHS family in Northern Ireland.

The Kindest regard,



Mark Koziol M.R.Pharm.S.
Chairman