

Health and Social Services Group
Y Grŵp Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Prif Swyddog Nyrsio - Cyfarwyddwr Nyrs GIG Cymru
Chief Nursing Officer - Nurse Director NHS Wales



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

14 April 2020

Directors of Nursing

CC for information:
Directors of Therapies and Health Science
Medical Directors
Directors of Workforce & OD

Via email.

Dear colleagues

RE: Research nurses and the COVID19 pandemic

As you will be aware, urgent public health research has been identified by the Chief Medical Officers in the UK as a priority that must be delivered across Wales in order to repurpose existing drugs and develop other new treatment options for patients with COVID-19. These clinical trials are an essential part of front-line treatments in the patient pathway and vital to both the development of evidence and knowledge about COVID-19 infection but also in providing treatment options for patients in a context where there are none.

Wales has a highly trained, experienced clinical research nurse workforce that are delivering COVID-19 studies and who are crucial to the continuation of these trials and the safe management of COVID-19 patients. Very few nurses in Wales have received the international, mandatory training to allow them to deliver clinical trials, and research nurses are a scarce resource. These research nurses are at the front line, in ITU, respiratory wards, Emergency Departments, care of the elderly wards and every area where COVID-19 patients are cared for, working side by side with ward nurses and other health professionals to deliver new treatments.

In the current pandemic, most non-COVID-19 clinical research has been suspended with the exception of treating and following up a small proportion of patients where the study provides their ongoing essential treatment or care, to ease pressure on the system.

As with many clinical areas in NHS Wales, the clinical research nurses are depleted due to sickness and self-isolation. As many research staff as is possible to spare have already been redeployed to front-line clinical services, recognising that this is a time of extreme need. However, this has further reduced capacity, making the delivery of COVID-19 studies increasingly challenging, as in many organisations these research



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nurses are now providing seven day a week cover and additional challenge is coming to support COVID-19 clinical research in the new temporary field hospitals. It is also likely that more research nurses will be required to expand and sustain this provision as patient numbers increase, staff sickness/absence continues and hospital facilities are expanded.

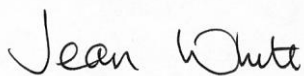
In order to support the research endeavour at this unprecedented time, I am writing to ask that we treat the importance of the delivery of COVID-19 studies as a front-line priority, and these feature in the discussions that may be taking place around the redeployment of the research nurses across Wales – many of whom are funded through the national infrastructure of Health and Care Research Wales.

By doing so, the prioritisation of COVID 19 research as a front-line priority will also facilitate a national approach to supporting and sustaining this research. Health and Care Research Wales is facilitating, through the R&D Directors, the mobilisation of research staff across and between NHS organisations where possible to ensure COVID 19 studies are delivered effectively and safely. To support this national effort, the research nurses should be deployed as follows:

- to deliver ongoing COVID-19 ward/ICU clinical trials across Wales;
- to mobilise research nurses between NHS organisations where numbers are depleted; and
- to provide clinical research capacity for additional hospital sites by providing research nurse leadership and support to these teams.

It is also clear that any redeployment of research nursesⁱ is not a binary option and research nurses can, where there is capacity, support other front-line services on a whole or part time basis and this provision will need to be responsive to demand. Keeping highly skilled research staff working on research activity will also have a greater impact for the greater number of patients across Wales, than any approach of redeployment where research nurses may be dispersed to support local services. I am grateful for your co-operation, and if you have any queries, your local R&D Director will be able to discuss with you and indicate the research capacity need for your organisation to support the all-Wales research response.

Yours sincerely



Professor Jean White CBE
Chief Nursing Officer
Nurse Director NHS Wales

ⁱ Although research nurses are referred to throughout this letter, the same priorities apply to other research support and delivery staff, such as research officers, trial managers and administrators, as well as research active allied health professionals.