

YORKSHIRE HEALTH CAMPAIGNS TOGETHER MEETING 1.5.20

1. News, information and discussion of the current situation

John Puntis gave an update on developments:

Personal protective Equipment (PPE)

John noted how the Government's narrative changed from claiming they have all the PPE needed but are having some problems getting it distributed then when this became untenable to suggesting staff must be misusing it then a week later saying there is an international shortage but we are doing our best to get it. Meanwhile quite a few companies have come forward saying that "we have offered to provide PPE but the Govt. hasn't taken up our offers". There has also been scepticism about the figs for PPE supplied as it has emerged that a pair of gloves counts as 2 items, cleaning fluid and other products are being included. Two doctors have launched a legal challenge over PPE saying it fails to comply with international standards set by the World Health Organization or domestic legislation on health and safety at work. See

<https://keepourhpublic.com/doctors-launch-legal-challenge-over-ppe/>

Handling of the pandemic.

The Times <https://bylinetimes.com/2020/04/11/a-national-scandal-a-timeline-of-the-uk-governments-woeful-response-to-the-coronavirus-crisis/> Guardian and others have published detailed catalogues of delays and failures from well before the pandemic to now. The Govt. has responded by saying that we did everything right at the right time and even talks of their "success" despite the UK death rate being the fourth highest in Europe (Belgium at top, but including all their care home deaths whether tested or not). They deny relying on a herd immunity approach but it is well documented.

Migrant charging

An estimated 618,000 people don't have proof of immigration status of whom 144,000 are children. There is some awareness that these barriers are particularly dangerous in the pandemic as they deter people seeking treatment and impede contact tracing. South Korea and Ireland have suspended charging so the door is ajar for a push on the issue.

The Immigration Bill is still on the statute book so low paid workers, many of whom we have working in social care and health are not eligible to come here.

Testing

This is still a massive issue. Problems with the large test centres set up were not surprising given provision was outsourced to Deloitte, Serco, Seneca & Boots. Normal tendering could be circumvented because of the pandemic. Tests have gone missing and some hospitals have advised staff not to use the test centres.

NHS Capacity

John thought it surprising that the NHS is reported to be well short of max capacity at the moment. Although this is a testament to staff it is also worrying, particularly given one third of people admitted to hospital die, compared with around 12% in China. He wondered if concern about ITUs being overwhelmed has led to more triaging / selection of who to offer intensive care. There hasn't been any national guidance for docs on how to manage this. NICE did issue a frailty score document but withdrew it. One can surmise the Govt. don't want a public discussion as it goes against the positive narrative they are putting out and might open the door to more legal challenges. There is also lurking concern about popular protest and civilian unrest which is identified in the national assessment of risks from the pandemic.

Nightingale Hospitals

These haven't taken off. John noted that some London Hospitals said that they weren't able to decant patients to the Nightingale for want of staff to move them safely. Now to be mothballed for 'the second wave.

Do Not Resuscitate Orders (DNR)

There was a problem with blanket letters being sent out from GP surgeries. DNR orders are meant to refer only to restarting one's heart when it has stopped but can be a barrier to intensive care because medical staff can be unaware of their narrow remit. NHSE has now written to all Trusts, CCGs and GPs to say don't use DNRs in blanket fashion. See John's piece on the KONP website <https://keepournhspublic.com/concern-over-dnrs/>

NHS Staff deaths.

Now believed to be 144; 29 London Transport staff have also died of Covid 19. BAME groups comprise about two thirds of deaths. International Workers Memorial Day on 28th April was a good opportunity to highlight the numbers of staff who have died and press for adequate PPE. John played The Last Post at the IWDM memorial event in Leeds before chair of the TUC, Jane Aitchison laid flowers. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8eRXvMuVcg>.

John noted that doctors have an obligation to report deaths to the coroner where occupational exposure to a pathogen may have been a factor but Govt. have said that Coroners don't should not consider wider issues of PPE!

Additional issues raised in discussion

Understanding the over-representation of Black and Ethnic Minorities in the Covid death figs.

Apart from minorities being more likely to suffer social deprivation and the pandemic highlighting how poorer communities with cramped housing have suffered most from coronavirus, Gwen pointed out that people from BAME backgrounds are less likely to be in management and more likely to be in exposed positions on the front line. She warned we need to be vigilant re potential racist exploitation of the figures.

Concerns around the possibility schools will re-open long before they might be considered safe.

This was raised by Nick who is a teacher. He said that Spain is planning to keep schools shut until September. We haven't even got testing in place. Mike F said that the Govt. have no clear plan for linking testing and tracing. They are only starting to recruit tracers and that will take weeks! He suggested that we have to be clear who would oversee health and safety in schools. John P said that a study on children in Germany showed asymptomatic children having just as high a viral load as sick adults therefore equally likely to spread Coronavirus if not more so as children can't consistently observe physical distancing. There is another study in the Netherlands which doesn't seem to confirm the German findings suggesting more research is urgently needed. He noted that elective surgery is starting up in some Covid free hospitals which will only be possible if there is intensive testing and re-testing of patients and staff and suggested something similar would be needed in schools to try to prevent spread. See John's piece on the national KONP website <https://keepournhspublic.com/dont-reopen-schools-until-it-is-safe/>

Social care

Mike F flagged up huge gaps in social care re protection and support and said staff are being sacked because they refuse to work without PPE.

NB Gilda has written piece on Social Care and the kind of immediate and longer term demands we should be making " Social Care: Rags to Recognition". It's on the national KONP website :

<https://keepournhspublic.com/social-care-needs-us/>

Lack of information and transparency from Government

Brenda said that the Govt. briefings have been awful/ lacked substance and their guidance lacked clarity.

Whistle blowing

John picked up Mike G's concern re staff being sacked for speaking out re PPE shortages. He said lots of Trusts have told staff not to go public. An experienced intensive care sister had a job offer rescinded after she made public statements about the shortage of PPE. It is understood that Dr. Arif who made a powerful plea for PPE on a recent Panorama programme has been suspended by his Trust. Nottingham KONP is trying to get in touch with him. (it turned out he had not been suspended!)

2. Fighting Back

Colin suggested that we shouldn't get too pre-occupied with challenging the Government's record at the moment to the exclusion of everything else, although we should make sure that all the political players know that there needs to be a full enquiry. He suggested we should focus on what be changed NOW e.g. PPE provision and the supply chain – getting British businesses involved, testing, migrant charges. He argued that we need to focus on decisions that will be taken not those which have been taken.

Nigel disagreed strongly. He said that the mistakes made are so criminal they can't be ignored. We shouldn't let people like Piers Morgan take on the role as biggest Government critic. He saw no inconsistency between criticising past mistakes as well as contesting present decisions. Deaths are happening because of incompetence and callousness. He has heard rumours that no one has come out of Bradford ICU alive. Poorer people are dying faster than others.

G – for interest the Guardian had an article today 1.5 which suggests: "Most deprived areas of England and Wales have 55.1 deaths per 100,000 people, compared with 25.3 in affluent areas

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/01/covid-19-deaths-twice-as-high-in-poorest-areas-in-england-and-wales>

Jenny considered any criticism of the Government's handling of the crisis is entirely appropriate. She said that there is no division between past and present decisions; the past decisions are playing out in the present. She noted that New Zealand, who seem to have handled the pandemic well, introduced an Epidemic Response Committee led by the leader of the opposition which scrutinised all decisions and gave immediate feedback. She suggested that we need similar scrutiny here where numerous committees are looking at different aspects. We should push for UK pandemic response committees and for local scrutiny committees to meet.

John P suggested that Colin and Nigel's positions were not incompatible.

John Carlisle said that Cuba put a plan in place to combat the pandemic in January long before their first cases which were all from tourists. Their methodology is good and they have recruited medical students and other young people to do contact tracing. He referred us to an article in Counterpunch vol. 27 no 1 "Why Cuba was ready for the Pandemic" by Charles McKelvey. John also noted that the pandemic in the UK has already claimed more lives than the 19,000 lost in the Battle for the Somme in the 1st World War.

3. National campaign updates

KONP/HCT

John said they urged all areas to support International Workers Memorial Day – "remember the dead and fight for the living" and protest re PPE. A group of nurses from Guys and St. Thomas' hospitals dropped an enormous banner from Westminster Bridge which said "WE ARE NOT DISPOSABLE - NOBODY GOES TO WORK TO DIE"

There is a new petition against outsourcing testing on Change.org and the original KONP, HCT/SHA petition with 6 demands has 300,000 signatures but needs more. See <https://www.change.org/p/boris-johnson-6-demands-from-nhs-staff-to-help-us-tackle-coronavirus>

KONP reps are getting media time with articles interviews, podcasts etc. and there are new articles going on the website all the time. Co- chair Tony O’Sullivan has a you tube clip emphasising our demands – see <https://www.facebook.com/keepournhspublic/videos/1602314919906920/>

The KONP NHS staff voices group held a very popular webinar on voices from the front line and a KONP/ HCT webinar **“Coronavirus Crisis: What now for the NHS?” is planned for May 5th 7 – 9pm**

Speakers include: Richard Horton, ed. The Lancet, Prof. Allyson Pollock – Public Health Consultant & Director Newcastle Uni. Centre for Excellence in Regulatory Science, Dr John Lister ed. of Health Campaigns Together, co-ed. of The Lowdown. Dr Sonia Adesara – Junior Doc & member of KONP’s NHS Staff Voices group, Pam Kleinot – Producer of Under The Knife. Register at https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_SeVsKXHHRIa2fvHiDRZVJg

Mike F advised that sadly Pete Gillard, treasurer of HCT and member of KONP EXEC died recently. He was a passionate campaigner for the NHS and will be sorely missed. Our condolences to his family and friends.

999 CALL FOR THE NHS

Jenny said that 999 has been running a national campaign to give Councils proper funding to respond to Covid 19. The Govt. has given another round of funding but it isn’t enough.

Jenny has asked Calderdale Council re testing and PPE but hasn’t had satisfactory answers. They said no GPs have complained of a shortage of PPE but locals know that at least some are struggling to get PPE as they have asked local people to assist.

999 is working with a public health doctor to try to get Calderdale to run a public health tracing pilot similar to one being done in Sheffield. Christine is also asking Kirklees.

4. What can WE do?

Thursday claps for the NHS

Everyone agreed it is good to use the Claps to highlight that staff are being put at risk and call for plentiful PPE and testing. Mike wondered if we could also raise the issue of defending whistle-blowers. Nigel suggested that people should shift from their doorsteps to hospitals as long as they observe physical distance, as this is more visible. Jenny said 999 has designed a new poster for the clap.

Using and challenging the media

Leeds KONP have had a couple of letters in the YEP since the lockdown and John has had a letter in the Guardian on PPE as well as doing press and radio interviews. It is not that difficult to get into the local press so hope others will do likewise. Nick said he has now taken up tweeting with help from Nicola. He suggested we might produce more posters to get round social media and be put up in windows. Nigel said we should get on to local/ community radio and TV particularly where we are having local actions. John Carlisle suggested we should be protesting about the BBC not scrutinising and questioning Govt.

Migrant charging - open letter

Gilda noted that Leeds KONP have written an open letter calling on our MPs, councillors, hospitals, trade unions and other organisations to do all they can to press the Govt. to drop NHS surcharges on workers and their families from overseas, many of whom are essential workers, and to get NHS charges on undocumented migrants dropped along with all reporting to the Home Office. The President of Leeds TUC is happy to sign the letter, which we will circulate as soon as we have a few other high profile signatories.

Scrutiny

Jenny hasn’t yet managed to pursue public meetings of our local and regional Scrutiny Board but will do.

PFI

John Carlisle noted this remains a key drain on hospital budgets at this critical time and now is a good time to call for it to end. He referenced a very good paper from Helen Mercer and Dexter Whitfield on how to go about getting rid of PFI - see attached.

Trade deals

Talks are taking place imminently. We Own it is currently offering training to people who want to help protect the NHS from Trade deals. See <https://keepournhspublic.com/campaigns/trade-agreements/>
Today 38 Degrees are urging people to write to Liz Truss.

Social Care

Leeds KONP is aiming to hold a public Zoom mtg. on Social Care later in May. Campaigning around a set of demands for social care should be on the agenda for the next KONP steering group meeting on 9th May.

March for the NHS and NHS birthday

Gilda suggested that we should not yet abandon hope of having some sort of march on July 25th instead of June 27th. We have been thinking about how to march without having a large gathering e.g. have 3 separate starting places where smaller groups can gather then join up and end by encircling LGI instead of having a rally. Alternatively we could co-ordinate mini marches or do relay bed pushes with costumes, music etc in suburbs and towns across Yorkshire or aim to encircle all our Yorks hospitals at the same time. We could also think about doing this on Sat 4th or Sunday 5th July (the NHS birthday) instead of 25th or if we are allowed to do some sort of march on 25th aim for action both days as the NHS birthday may well be high-jacked by the Govt. and everyone else as one big clap. We need to get across celebration, protest and a massive call for public, free at the point of use, Health and Social Care systems.

Mike Forster thought focusing on our local hospitals for the birthday would be good.

5. Summary Action Agreed

1. **Push the “Test, test, test, PPE, Keep Key Workers Virus free” message**
Gilda can send A4 rainbow poster on request and will pass on a new one 999 is preparing
2. **Consider taking the clap out from our streets to more public places such as outside hospitals, maybe even Social Care homes.**
3. **Spread campaign re migrant charging (Leeds open letter attached)**
4. **Press local and regional health and Social Care Scrutiny Boards to meet (Jenny writing)**
5. **Start some serious campaigning for a national, free at the point of use, public national Social care service.**
6. **Don’t lose sight of Trade deals and exert what pressure we can on our MPs et al**
7. **Do all we can to support whistle-blowers**
8. **Think creatively about co-ordinated celebration, protest, campaigning and maybe even marching in July. Possibly on the weekend of 4th and 5th and maybe 25th as well.**

Next meeting: Friday 29th May 4- 5.30

GP