

*From the Chief Nursing Officer*  
**Professor Charlotte McArdle**



**BY EMAIL:**

Central Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Council

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Dear Colleagues,

**RE: Open letter from CNO to all nurses, midwives and nursing and midwifery students**

I would like to begin by expressing my thanks and appreciation to nurses and midwives throughout Northern Ireland for the dedication and professionalism they have demonstrated during this extremely challenging time. As Chief Nursing Officer, I am very proud of how the nursing and midwifery professions have met the COVID-19 emergency response; demonstrating positivity and courage across the wide range of practice and service areas. Be assured that your professionalism and contribution has never been more vital or more valued by those serving at the highest level of government; your multidisciplinary colleagues and most importantly, the patients, families and the communities for whom you provide care and services.

The applause that has been ringing out from doorsteps across Northern Ireland on Thursday nights shows how much the whole community values your work and has faith in each of you. That faith is very well placed.

It is clear that the emergency response to this pandemic requires additional people to support the health and social care workforce who are working under unprecedented pressure. To address this issue, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) has established the COVID-19 temporary register from the 27 March 2020. This has enabled us to expand the nursing and midwifery workforce by reaching out to those who have retired or lapsed their registration over the past number of years and provided opportunities for early registration for overseas staff. I am exceptionally grateful for the excellent response demonstrated by those who have volunteered to return to practice and support the professional response to this pandemic. Each and every new registrant on the emergency register is a very welcome addition to the professional team and the support you will provide will have a significant impact on outcomes for patients and the multidisciplinary workforce.

Moreover, I specifically want to thank the nursing and midwifery students for their valuable contribution to the delivery of safe, person-centred care as members of the nursing and midwifery team. I recognise that this is an uncertain time causing great anxiety for many of you and your families. The NMC have revised pre-registration programmes and provided students with options to undertake clinical placements in an attempt to expand the nursing and midwifery workforce. This approach enables students to continue their educational programme whilst contributing to clinical services during the pandemic. These options are completely voluntary and whether as a student you decide to opt in or out, I continue to recognise your significant contribution to nursing and midwifery teams and the delivery of safe, effective and person-centred care whilst on placement.

I would like to acknowledge the concerns that have been raised over the issue of personal protective equipment (PPE) over the past number of weeks. As Chief Nursing Officer I can assure you that the safety of frontline staff is of the utmost importance and that concrete action is being taken on, firstly, ensuring the supply of PPE and secondly, the safe use of PPE for all staff caring for patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is important for all staff, hospital, community, independent sector and across all specialties and services areas. No matter where nurses and midwives are providing care we must prioritise the use of appropriate PPE.

## **PPE Guidance**

Last week the UK Government and NHS leaders from a range of medical, midwifery and nursing Royal Colleges published new guidance about PPE. The guidance has been agreed by the 4 Chief Medical Officers, Chief Nursing Officers and Chief Dental Officers and is applicable in all parts of the UK. This provides detailed information on the types of PPE required for the different clinical settings across the health and social care settings in Northern Ireland and it includes a level of flexibility which I hope will allay many of the concerns raised to date. I can also confirm that guidance on PPE will be continuously reviewed and updated to take account of new evidence as it rapidly evolves regarding COVID-19. I encourage you to read and work in line with the guidance.

## **PPE supply**

I welcomed the announcement last week that the NHS was to supply an extra 5 million pieces of PPE, including aprons, gloves, masks and goggles to Northern Ireland. A large part of this shipment has arrived and the remainder will be with us very shortly, enhancing our significant stock quantities. I am keen to assure you that we have sufficient stocks for the projected peak in COVID-19 cases in the coming weeks and that we are working very hard to secure more supplies, given expected future demand and the likelihood of a second surge later in the year. In addition, I recognise the importance of assuring easy access to PPE through appropriate distribution to all frontline settings and establishing support for staff to raise concerns within their employing organisation.

What we are currently experiencing is unprecedented and extraordinarily difficult for everyone. I believe it is important to openly acknowledge that many of us, as nurses and midwives are frightened and uncertain regarding the impending challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to meet these challenges, as professionals we will need to adopt a flexible approach. This includes asking staff to work in unfamiliar settings, in different clinical roles or undertake a task focussed approach to provision of care – we all have a leadership responsibility to make it easy for staff to do the right thing.

Over the surge period I anticipate that ensuring optimum staffing levels and skill mix as outlined in the Delivering Care Policy Framework will be difficult and will need to be suspended. Under these conditions, nursing or midwifery staff need to consider how the 'new' team is managed, using a more task based approach based on professional judgement

to maximise team members' knowledge and skills. This includes the delegation and supervision of tasks and duties to others in the team using the framework developed by NIPEC and use of communication tools such as SBAR will be important. I recognise many of you may have concerns about both the professional practicalities and implications of working outside familiar practice. I want to assure you that the NMC as your regulator recognises the challenges presented by temporary changes to practice and the likely pressures presented by staff shortages due to sickness or caring responsibilities. However, it is important to recognise that as a registrant you will be supporting the provision of patient care, as part of a multidisciplinary team though bringing your individual skill set within the limits of your competence. Over the expected surge, nurses and midwives will be key members of the multidisciplinary team, leading and sharing accountability for delivering the best outcome possible for patients in unique and highly challenging environments. Your skills and knowledge are vital to help deliver safe and effective care to as many patients as possible.

As Chief Nursing Officer, I commit to working with my Departmental colleagues and midwifery and nursing leaders within your employing organisations to ensure that you have the best information, support and equipment to enable you to do your job as effectively as possible. This includes providing timely and appropriate access to testing.

In conclusion, I want to acknowledge the personal impact the COVID-19 is having on us all. As registrants we are familiar with providing care for our patients and their loved ones, however during this period we are also concerned for our own safety and that of our loved ones. It is at these times that we need to look after each other and keep focus on our own health and wellbeing, which I recognise is difficult when your professional and personal life demands so much. Every day now brings new challenges and your response to date has been exemplary. I am confident that you will continue to rise to the challenge presented in the months to come.

2020 was designated the Year of the Nurse and Year of the Midwife by the World Health Organisation, providing an opportunity *to celebrate, and raise the profile and the reputation of the professions*. You should be proud of what you have achieved as nurses and midwives within the first few months of 2020 and how you will continue to meet the challenges presented over the next few months. In our professional response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have an opportunity to step forward, lead and rise to the challenge. I have

seen so many examples of this over recent weeks - genuinely amazing. I know the politicians, the public and our patients recognise the profile of our professions as critical alongside our multidisciplinary colleagues in facing the unprecedented challenges ahead. Thank you for your vital contribution. There is no doubt that regardless where you work, not only in direct care delivery but in all professional roles such as testing, education, research, policy development etc, your contribution to the wider effort will save many patient lives. We *will* beat this pandemic and we *will* celebrate 2020 as the Year of the Nurse and the Midwife.

Yours sincerely,



**Professor Charlotte McArdle**  
Chief Nursing Officer

Cc: Pauline Shepherd, IHCP  
Anne Speed, UNISON