**President’s blog – 23 March**

The weekend is over and as so often in the last few weeks much changes over a short period of time. We have already taken the very difficult decision to close the College. It will be a new way of working for many of us but it is an important step to take.

The decision has been made to protect not just our College staff but most importantly their loved ones, many of whom are in High risk groups. Equally important is our duty to the entire population of the United Kingdom. Many of you will have seen disturbing images on the television of large gatherings of folk meeting in open spaces drinking and eating together this weekend. This was against all advice from the Government and our Chief Medical Officers.

We have to be responsible and we have to get the message over in a stronger and more effective way and which resonates with everybody. The reality is this, the NHS has been very stretched in a number of places in the United Kingdom particularly in the south, London and in Birmingham. There are many healthcare workers, nurses and doctors putting their lives at risk treating the many cases of COVID-19 that are entering our Emergency Department wards and Intensive Care Units.

The NHS is treating those that have fallen victim of the virus. The message is this and it is stark. The virus does not spread itself - it is the population that spreads the virus. The solution to this problem is clear. It is the population that holds the key. The general public has to act responsibly and stop meeting in homes, public places and even outside. We must practice social distancing, self-isolation and of course now formal shielding of our most vulnerable patients with coexistent diseases. If everyone in the country recognises this we will get control of this outbreak and we will save thousands of lives. It is clear that London has dealt with a huge influx of cases of COVID-19. It has also struggled to keep up with the large numbers. The reason that the virus is spreading in London is because it can. It is the population that is spreading the virus. It has to stop!

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the First Minister of Scotland along with the CMOs have been crystal clear about what we all must do. No one believes that this is going to be easy. It is against our natural instincts that we isolate ourselves from those who we love. However, it is because we love them that we must act so that we can protect those who are less strong and less able to withstand this awful disease. I implore all of you to spread the message. Responsibility for not just yourself but your family, your friends and for everyone. Before welcoming your son, your brother, your sister, your daughter home - think - does it risk other people? What are the consequences of spreading the infection.

I am absolutely convinced that the Government in Westminster and in Holyrood are doing everything possible to make sure that our health service is ready to look after and prevent avoidable deaths. We all can make the difference to the numbers that need to come to be looked after by our NHS. The personal protective equipment has been supplied now and is being delivered to hospitals, care homes and pharmacies all over the United Kingdom. This has been a huge logistical challenge but it is happening. I really do believe that the government and the NHS are doing everything they can to help with that.

I myself went out at 7 o’clock this morning to the supermarket to get a few provisions including milk and fresh vegetables. I was delighted to see that at 7 o’clock in the morning that this was an hour for all NHS key workers to get the provisions as well. The Supermarket was closed to all others. I was also heartened by the fact that there were not huge queues waiting to get in and for those that were, they were keeping their distance from each other in a responsible manner. I saw no poor behaviour.

We still have time to make a change to the pattern of this outbreak. I don’t need to tell our Members and Fellows that common sense, care, concern and compassion is what we need here.

As I write I see that Boris Johnson has now announced more stringent measures to limit movement. He has quite rightly said he will enforce people to stay at home, limiting outings only for very specific reasons – for example to collect shopping (infrequently), collect prescriptions or support elderly relatives. Everyone is to be allowed out once per day to exercise either alone or with the family they live with. He has said if friends ask you to visit – don’t. A small sacrifice to make to protect the people we love.

The next few days are really important as we will discover if the measures that have been taken have helped to slow the rate of spread.

Stay safe, be strong and keep inside.