Returning to general practice in response to COVID-19

Prof. Amanda Howe, RCGP President

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As many of you will know, the RCGP recently established a new online forum, to give members the chance to discuss any questions or concerns they have about COVID-19, and the national response to this pandemic.

I’ve taken a lead role in representing the College on the forum, and it has been uplifting to see so many of you discussing your desire to return to general practice to support the response to COVID-19. On behalf of the College, I’d like to express my sincere gratitude.

**Phenomenal response**

Already, the GMC has announced that nearly 12,000 doctors have agreed to return temporarily to the register, of which a third are GPs. This is a phenomenal response, which speaks to the care and compassion of our colleagues across the UK.

Of course, not everyone who wants to contribute has left the GMC register. Some of you will only have left the performers list (perhaps because you are no longer doing clinical work), while others will be working less-than-full-time in frontline care (for example as a retainer or a locum) and will want to do more.

Every clinician should decide for themselves what sort of role they want to take on. NHS England is particularly keen to encourage returners to join the COVID Clinical Assessment Service (CCAS), which support NHS 111 in triaging patients who may need admission to hospital due to COVID-19 and is currently facing very high demand. This work can be done remotely, without patient contact, making it a low-risk option. However, there is also the possibility of supporting a specific practice as a frontline GP.

There will also be those of you who do not want to return to take on a clinical role, but still want to put your training and expertise to good use. You might, for example, want to provide mentoring and non-clinical support to GPs who have gone back to clinical practice, or find themselves working in new and demanding contexts. We shall also potentially need educator support with changes to CPD/debriefing needs and support for training and assessments.

Wherever and however you can help, your expertise and experience will be valued beyond measure at this challenging time.

Equally, some of you will have been contacted, but feel you cannot offer any additional support at the moment. The College will continue to support all its members, whether or not they feel able to offer additional service at this time.
If you do decide to return to the workforce, you will be able to choose how much time to contribute and are free to stop working at any point. Contracts will reflect standard terms and conditions such as working hour protections, pay arrangements, and annual leave entitlement. Returners will be provided with a fast-tracked induction and training programme, and with any resources and support needed, for example to enable home-working.

The College is also in the process of developing dedicated guidance for those considering returning to the workforce - these will be found in our Covid-19 Resource Hub as they become available.

**Contact your national healthcare body**

Whatever your specific situation, the first place to go for more information on how you can help will be your national healthcare body.

There are specific FAQs on returning for all four nations, as follows:

- **England**
- **Northern Ireland**
- **Scotland**
- **Wales**

These FAQs should answer most questions, although they can never cover every situation.

**Having read these FAQs, you should carefully consider what sort of work you would be willing to do, and discuss this with your relevant healthcare body, who will seek to find the best way to use your skills and experience.**

Most returners will have been contacted by national healthcare bodies last week, and invited to complete a short form, allowing them to return to the medical performers list (where necessary) and to indicate the sort of work they might be willing to do.

If you have not been contacted (for example because your details have changed), and would like to offer your support, please contact the relevant national body.

- In England: [medicalGP.returners@nhs.net](mailto:medicalGP.returners@nhs.net)
- In Northern Ireland: [correspondence@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto:correspondence@health-ni.gov.uk)
- In Scotland: [scotland@nhs.net](mailto:scotland@nhs.net)
- In Wales: [HSSWorkforceOD@gov.wales](mailto:HSSWorkforceOD@gov.wales)

As you can imagine, national bodies are processing many enquires at this time, and are responding as quickly as possible, so please be patient.
COVID-19 resource hub

As mentioned above, the College is developing resources to support returners as part of our dedicated COVID-19 Resource Hub. These include guides to aid decision-making about how you can contribute and to navigate the return process, as well as a structured reflective template to help you identify your skillset and any support you might need.

What’s more, we are offering free access for a fixed period to our hugely popular eLearning resources including Essential Knowledge Updates and GP SelfTest for all returners. All current College members already have access to these resources and we are offering free access to lapsed and non-members to support their return to practice. Lapsed members can login and non-members can register on the RCGP website.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do continue to raise them on our members forum, or by emailing Covid19@rcgp.org.uk.

I would like to thank each and every one of you for your service, both during this current time of pressure, and throughout your working lives.

Written by Professor Amanda Howe

Professor Amanda Howe is President of RCGP and qualified as MRCGP in 1983, has worked as a GP since 1984, and currently practices at Bowthorpe Surgery in Norwich. She is also Professor of Primary Care at the University of East Anglia. She has a wealth of experience within RCGP, where she has previously held the positions of Vice Chair of Professional Development and Honorary Secretary. She is a Board member of the East Anglia Faculty and was their Provost 2016-2019. She is also the immediate past President of WONCA – the World Organisation of Family Doctors - in which role she promoted the crucial role of GPs in running effective and efficient health systems.