

NHS Volunteers and response to COVID-19

TO WHOM DOES THIS APPLY?

This guidance is for staff who manage volunteers within the NHS in Wales, in primary or secondary care.

REASON FOR GUIDANCE:

The current incidence of COVID-19 is likely to impact on health services for many months.

Many volunteers are likely to be unable or unwilling to volunteer, for example because they or their families are vulnerable to infection.

At the same time there will be increased strain on health services, with likely increased demand for volunteer services as well as new opportunities for volunteers to be involved.

New legislation aims to make it easier for people to volunteer, to help support health and care services.

IN A SITUATION OF 'LOCKDOWN' CAN PEOPLE VOLUNTEER

Volunteering can still continue where this provides essential support for peoples health and wellbeing in the community or provides support for our health and care services.

Further guidance is expected on what constitutes 'essential volunteering' in these unprecedented times.

CARE FOR VOLUNTEERS AND MINIMISING SPREAD OF INFECTION

Some volunteers need to stop volunteering pro tem, on the grounds of their age (over 70 years), underlying health conditions ([see UK Government list](#) of those at risk), or if they display symptoms of 'flu'. Others will choose to stop temporarily.

A risk review of volunteers may be appropriate, asking key questions about vulnerabilities and encouraging those at risk to 'pause' their volunteering. Volunteers may feel duty bound to carry on and need your active encouragement to stand down.

Any wards that are closed to visitors due to Covid – 19 should also be closed to volunteers.

Updates on Covid-19 which are communicated to staff in all settings should also be shared with volunteers.

Advice on handwashing and the importance of social distancing must be reinforced.

OPTIMISING VOLUNTEER SERVICES

Some volunteer activities may be stopped in order to avoid direct patient contact.

Some activities may be curtailed simply due to reduced volunteer numbers or due to increased priorities elsewhere. If you need to operate

restricted volunteer services in one area temporarily, be sure to communicate this clearly to staff.

New or continuing roles might include:

Reception/ information desk, pharmacy runners, PPE (re-stocking personal protective equipment, gel dispensers, masks), patient transport, cancelling and rescheduling appointments, telephone support and home from hospital support.

Some NHS colleagues (in England) are creating a generic 'Response volunteer' role who can respond flexibly. This may be accompanied by introducing a daily request system for staff.

Please advertise any new role on the www.volunteering-wales.net website, selecting the 'Covid-19' category, which enables people to search for these easily. This is where Welsh Government publicity will be directing volunteers.

INCREASING THE VOLUNTEER WORKFORCE

If more volunteers are needed, there is need to consider how you might enable fast track recruitment and remote access to essential training, volunteers may be recruited from:

- The existing volunteer pool
- Former volunteers
- Employees from local corporate organisations
- Universities and colleges
- Retired staff
- Members of the public
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New [coronavirus legislation](#) aims to increase the available health and care workforce and to reduce the number of administrative tasks they have to perform. Temporary changes are expected to DBS requirements, in order to allow volunteers to be more quickly recruited.

Employees will be entitled to take periods of unpaid leave in order to volunteer and to receive some financial compensation in recognition of their lost earnings. This is likely to result in an increase in offers from members of the public to volunteer.

A skills audit of existing and new volunteers could facilitate redeployment including identifying where volunteers have professional experience or skills that can be put to effective use.

WORKING WITH VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Where volunteers from external voluntary organisations are involved on your premises, you may want to review how these volunteer activities align with your current priority needs and whether you can collaborate to maximise volunteer impact.

For example, such organisations may be able to recruit and train new volunteers speedily, as well as taking responsibility for the support and supervision of volunteers.

If there is not the capacity or infrastructure for fast tracked recruitment to volunteering within the NHS (or a voluntary organisation operating within the NHS), or if you are unable to involve volunteers due to health board policy, you can signpost enquirers to voluntary sector partners, the [local volunteer centre](#) or to the www.volunteering-wales.net website.

Using this [link](#) and scrolling down the page will display volunteering opportunities connected to COVID 19.

Volunteers have a vital role to play in supporting those who are vulnerable within their communities.

The safety of volunteers and patients is paramount and volunteers within all settings should be supported and supervised.

See also WCVA guidance: [Community Response and Covid 19 - enabling safe and effective practice](#).

FURTHER INFORMATION

There is an active online forum thread on the subject of volunteering and Covid-19 on the Helpforce Network which you can apply to join [here](#) or email fliddell@wcva.cymru.

WCVA/Helpforce Cymru
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