



## **An open letter to our members from the Board of the British Academy of Audiology**

**Dear BAA Members in our Health Services,**

It is very important that your professional body keeps you informed and helps you to continue to deliver outstanding services to your patients who have or develop hearing and balance issues.

We know that many of you are being redeployed into frontline roles to help during the Covid-19 Pandemic and it has come to our attention that some commercial businesses are trying to use this to their own advantage.

We know at least one commercial audiology company has directly approached, in all four home nations, your commissioners and regional boards. They are suggesting they can help take over your existing patients who may need support during the time when your services are operating safely and effectively with smaller staff teams and with remote care as a preference for your existing patients.

The approach was summarised by a CCG to one of our Heads of Service as:

***“The CCG has been approached by a company offering their services in terms of providing essential aftercare to support hearing aid users (batteries, spare parts, tuning, repairs and replacements) and we are told they have established themselves so that they can support any hearing aid users who cannot access support from their original provider.”***

We know from our continued engagement with you, our members in NHS Audiology services, that this is simply not true. Not only are you willing to support your own patients, but you have been doing so for the last two weeks whilst operating safely and within Health Service guidelines.

We **strongly urge** each NHS Audiology Department to make **urgent** contact with their local commissioners to reiterate that your services are still operating, what services you are providing and any changes you have made to provision to ensure your patients and staff operate with the health and safety of our community in mind.

BAA Board has concerns regarding the recent changes to the *Covid-19 Prioritisation within community health services* document. It has been rewritten to include the use of private services for NHS patients, and this would imply that departments are not able to maintain their service at this time. Our engagement with BAA members has shown that departments are consistently providing safe, remote services to their existing patients. See page 9, point 3 of the updated [Guidance](#) to see this change in full. It now states:

***“CCGs can consider working with community audiology providers to provide alternative locations for other services to provide remote support and other essential care where appropriate”***

Previous wording here was a **stop** for all services as below

***“Consider use / referral of private clinics which provide micro syringing and are managed by nurses and CQC at least good***

## May be a need for supply of batteries through NHS community audiology services where these are a specialist item linked to the type of hearing aid prescribed”

We do not believe that this change is in the best interests of NHS Audiology patients. To transfer their aftercare to other providers when Audiology Departments are providing excellent remote care services, free at the point of delivery, to their existing patients does not provide benefits.

If you have no access to the audiology records of the individual, the provision of safe remote care is harder to manage and will lead to unnecessary delay, or increased work for the usual clinic staff at a time when they are under pressure. Not having existing records also leads to a potential for close contact work to be carried out, such as impression taking or hearing assessment. This is unnecessary if the patient is managed through their usual provider who has access to the latest information on the patient already.

It is imperative that the vulnerable patients we look after hear well, but we should ensure this whilst maintaining a safe social distance and, if at all possible, without them leaving their homes or being in contact with anyone outside their households, as per the government advice at this time.

Please contact your commissioners, regional boards or local GP network **now** to ensure they know how to access your services for the benefit of your patients.

We would also suggest you consider the use of social media in line with your employers communication protocols and tag BAA on Twitter @baaudiology or contact [victoria@baaudiology.org](mailto:victoria@baaudiology.org) with any information you are able to share about your services.

Social media advertising from at least one commercial organisation is suggesting your departments are closed and BAA has been trying to debunk this using posts and information from you in your departments. Please look at #StillHereForYou on our social media for access to this work.

BAA Board are working hard to support you during this difficult time and to promote the fantastic work you are doing to continue to provide services to your patients. **You must act** too to ensure that accurate information is available about your local services at this time.

Good luck and stay safe.

### Your BAA Board of Directors

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