**Re: Face mask use.**

Dear Member of [or insert name]

As the Corona Virus pandemic continues to change our health system and the wearing of face masks becomes more common, I would like to draw your attention to an issue with all face masks, and hope that you can support changes, information and publicity of the issues.

Whilst I support the use of face masks to reduce the spread of Coronavirus when required by the government, I am concerned that this will create a **significant disadvantage** to the 1 in 6 of the UK population who are Deaf or have hearing loss and rely on lip reading and facial expressions to communicate.

I am an audiologist and within NHS Hospitals we are already working to high standards of social distancing and adapted practice within our departments. I would expect to be able to continue our noncontact work with patients at a safe 2m distance without face coverings, whilst appropriately using PPE in close contact procedures.

I am aware of work being undertaken - at the direction of the English Chief Scientific Officer, Professor Dame Sue Hill - at Addenbrookes hospital Cambridge by their Clinical Engineering Department to produce a CE-marked clear panel face mask. I would urge you to ask our government or assembly on my behalf if this work will feed into the health system in (Northern Ireland/Scotland/Wales). I would urge you to investigate is there is also work and a commitment to ensure the funding for development, testing and production of a CE marked clear panel face mask being undertaken in this country and if this work is adequately funded so that these masks can be developed quickly and manufactured so there is no barrier to access such masks.

There are areas that also need immediate national guidance for all staff groups in NHS Hospitals

Action is required immediately on the following;

* If a patient identifies themselves as requiring lip reading anywhere in the NHS, will staff be permitted to conduct their appointment without a face mask at a 2m distance?
* Do you have any provision for NHS staff who are Deaf or have hearing loss? Is there extra funding available to have access to technology, for example remote microphones for hearing aid users, employer provision of tablets for using speech to text apps? How will this be equitable across the NHS Trusts and how can this be accessed?
* I would urge you as my representative to ask for publication of the attached good communication tactics to every hospital staff member
* In order to relieve anxiety for those who are Deaf or have hearing loss I would ask you to lobby the relevant ministers to share information to the wider public audience on good communication tactics to help reduce the anxiety for those with hearing loss and Deafness who may be concerned about attending hospital appointments, as they know they will not hear staff well if they are wearing face masks.
* Assurance is also required for Audiologists that their departments will be able to access adequate PPE to enable them to continue with their plans to rebuild services.

I urge you to ask government to look at the public information they share to encourage good communication tactics from the public, and to encourage those making themselves face masks to make clear panel masks. Information on these can be found at <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/diy-face-masks-with-clear-panels/>

As a part of the Healthcare Science network, I understand the issues that may lead to the wider use of PPE within hospitals. Along with my professional body, the British Academy of Audiology, I am asking you to help me advocate for our colleagues, patients and members of the public who rely on lipreading to aid communication by asking for positive actions to support the increased use of face masks within hospitals and the wider community.

I request you seek an agreement from the government to consider and address the needs of the hearing impaired and Deaf community who need lip reading support to communicate.

I would be grateful for your support in this matter and your earliest response to these concerns I am happy to discuss the issues further.

Yours faithfully [sincerely, if you insert name above]

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