

## BAA President Blog – 26<sup>th</sup> July 2021

I am thankful for the recent good weather and being able to enjoy being outside a bit more, I hope you have also been able to do so. However, with more of the recent restrictions being lifted how are we all feeling about it? Certainly, my team felt despair at the announcement of not having to wear face masks - knowing how many of our service users may take that approach. Thankfully, the NHS has taken the sensible approach and is still applying wearing of masks, unless there is a good reason not to.

On that topic, as we know how restrictive masks are for communication, I attended the Transparent Mask stakeholder update in June. They have just sent through the notes from that meeting, so I want to update you all on it. Here is a summary and links to the relevant sites for more information:

There were over 250 attendees, with very supportive engagement and fantastic participation, enabling helpful and insightful discussions. Some of the key points included:

- A clear demand for a fully compliant Transparent Mask to be made available for use throughout health and social care, and within COVID-19 care settings.
- Mask requirements are dependent on settings - For example, a different mask may be needed in an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) or for Speech and Language Therapists, or different masks may suit the needs of lip readers or patients with dementia.

Following the event, this is the brief update they have provided:

*The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is keen to see a fully Infection Prevention Control (IPC) compliant item available soon and is working hard to make this happen. We anticipate the Transparent Face Mask procurement will take place very soon and we will provide further details once available. DHSC published an update online on 8th July at DHSC recognises the importance of transparent face masks to make communication easier - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)).*

*A transparent face mask working group has been set up by NHS England and NHS Improvement. DHSC has produced a new technical specification which provides testing, design and performance requirements for single-use transparent face masks which are intended to provide comparable protection to that of a Type IIR medical mask. The transparent mask technical specification has been published online at Transparent face mask technical specification - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)).*

*Several suppliers have submitted documentation for their Transparent Face Mask to be approved and certified against the Transparent Mask Technical Specification. The DHSC Technical Assurance Team is currently reviewing these submissions and the results of this review will be key to any procurement of such Masks by DHSC/NHS. Alternatively local procurement teams can undertake the assessment for themselves. However, there are currently no transparent face masks that meet the EN14683 standard despite claims to the contrary. Products which are not fully compliant with the Technical Specification and the EHSR should not be used within the health and social care sector.*

*Last month's stakeholder event also highlighted the willingness of many participants to take part in engagement panels concerning transparent masks and indeed other wider interests.*

*We are currently considering the questions and suggestions raised at the event and will circulate the key themes as well as our proposed next steps once complete. Meanwhile, we would just like to thank everyone for their ongoing patience with this procurement process. Your continued engagement and feedback are both extremely valuable.*

I hope this answers some questions many of you have had and, like you, I have been frustrated by all this but now understand why it takes so long to get these things through. I am looking forward to the next stage and hope this happens very soon. I know there are groups that have contacted BAA to highlight the issues and make suggestions and wished to send a joint letter to the DoH. I have given them the feedback from the event and hope they can get involved.

We had a Board meeting last week, with a lot of good projects being worked on. Please do complete the members survey for the ED&I group as it will help us shape our future. I am delighted how many members and non-members have already booked for conference. I know it can take a while to get approval, find the funding and then get the requisition and PO numbers through. Be quick for the free places there are just a handful left and it will be first to complete the bookings that get them.

If you have any abstracts that you would like to share with the wider Audiology community, please do send them in as soon as you can. We really look forward to the posters and presentations as we learn so much from them and are amazed at all the great research and audits going on.

Take care and please do talk to us if you have anything to raise or wish your Board to do.

Kathryn Lewis